

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year:</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
MISSING January 27	"Man Who Walks - -"	Jeremiah -
January 28	"The Primary Task Of The Church"	
February 4	"One Story: Two Houses"	Matthew 7: 24-25
February 11	"Eye Witness"	Matthew 17
February 18	"Eye Opener"	Matthew 9:25
February 25	"To Begin Again"	Genesis 13: 3-4
MISSING March 4	"God's Man-On-The-Road"	Luke 18:31
March 11	"Temptation - AS Our Lord Knew It"	
MISSING March 18	"Temptation - Not By Bread Alone"	Matthew 4: 4-5
MISSING March 25	"Temptation - To Live Irresponsibly"	Matthew 4: 5-7
April 1	"Temptation - The Examination"	Matthew 4:1
MISSING April 8	"Temptation - To Withstand It -"	
April 22	"While It Was Still Dark"	John 20: 21
April 29	"He Is Not Here"	
April 30	"Guess Who Came To Dinner"	Luke 24
May 13	"- -On Marriage - -"	
May 20	"Lost Note In Our Thought Of God"	
May 27	"As The Face Of God"	Genesis 33:10
June 3	"Mapping A Personal Program"	
June 10	"Happiness Is - -"	Psalms 119

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June 10	"When The Day Was Fully Come"	
June 17	"Misison Possible"	
June 24	"Looking For God --?"	
July 1	"A Nation Under God"	
July 29	"While It Is Day"	
August 5	"Problems, Anyone"	
August 12	"The Egypt Myth"	Jeremiah 41, 42
August 19	"God Is I Like An Old Man Running"	
August 26	"The Fruit Tress Must Remain"	Deut. 20: 9
September 2	"To be Content"	Philippians 4:11
September 9	"In A wise Passiveness"	Matthew 6:6
September 16	"Deo Et Patria"	Psalms 67
September 16	"Day By Day"	II Corinth. 4:16
September 23	"He Came To Be Our Friend"	John 12:47
September 30	"Beyond Cynicism"	Isaiah 29:8
October 14	"Sing Praise To God"	
October 28	"The True Church"	John 8:21
November 4	"About The Future Life"	John 14:12
November 11	"On Taking God Seriously"	
November 18	"Even When Things Go Wrong"	Psalms 145:9
November 25	"Now About Judgment Day"	

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SERMON TITLE

TEXT

December 2 “- - About Mary And Joseph”

December 9 “- - About The Shepherds ”

December 16 “- -About The Wise Men”

January 28, 1973

GRACE, Mercy and Peace
from God our Father, and
from His Son, Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord be with
you all. Amen.

"THE PRIMARY TASK OF THE CHURCH"

You've heard it announced, tomorrow is the time for our Annual Meeting. Now what happens at an annual meeting?

Among other things, we receive the reports of our work during the past year. In fact, that Book of Reports as it has already been readied, and some of you have received the copies -- a few of us, very few, I dare say, have read that Book of Reports cover to cover, paragraph by paragraph. And if you'll allow me to say it, my initial impression, having read the Book of Reports thoroughly, was something of the impression that I get when I read those family newsletters that you include in your Christmas greetings....

"....Johnnie's captain of his team"

"....Susie's on the honor roll"

"....my husband got a promotion....and I am
president of the local club....."

...so it goes on, you see, paragraph to paragraph, telling the good things, the fine features of the past year.

And why not? If we can't share our joy with our friends, with whom can we share it? And who's about to parade his failures?

Well, having said that, you've caught what you can rightfully read

between the lines. It's a positive report that you'll get. We've fairly succeeded (the word is used advisedly), in almost every direction. All bills have been paid. We've kept current with the mortgage payment, as far as the bank is concerned. Almost every aspect of the work shows some type of positive growth and enlargement and expansion. We're grateful for it.

The reports of the staff will indicate to you that they are committed, that they are qualified, and that a good healthy spirit prevails. For all of this we are profoundly grateful.

Now I must say to you very quickly that there may be some of you who, when you come tomorrow night, will have the impression that this is a business meeting, this is the time we concern ourselves with the business aspect of the church. And so you may be inclined to think long in terms of figures, statistics and dollars-and-cents. And you shan't be faulted for it, because this is a necessary aspect of our work. But this is not the primary business of the church. And that's why this sermon is being preached to you at this hour, in anticipation of tomorrow's meeting.

The sermon bears the title, "The Primary Task of The Church" and as every sermon ought to have, it has a text. And the text, the concluding words of the last chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew -- the parting words, if you please, of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ must always be seen for what he is, not only as Saviour, but as the Lord and King of the Church, the Head of the Church. That's why we must give more-than-ordinary attention to His words, and significantly so since they were His parting words:

"To them he said, Go - preach - teach -
baptize - make disciples . . . "

This, I say to you, is the primary task of the Church. Anything and everything that you may read about last year has no significance whatsoever unless it's understood in this light.

To what extent, then, have we been about the preaching and the teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? To what extent have we made new disciples? It's not enough that we should have nurtured the old - - but to what degree have we expanded?

You will be pleased to note, and I say this as candidly as I can, with no measure of pride.....I presume that every year since this congregation began, we've been able to record an increase in membership...That's a rare thing these days. It is true this year as well.

But having said that, I am in duty bound to bring to your attention that all is not well in Zion in this regard. Statistically speaking, there has been a decline in church attendance. The authority, none other than the Editor of The LUTHERAN, who ought to know. In his August 2 issue of 1972 there is a lead article with this headline: LUTHERANS IN NORTH AMERICA HAD MEMBERSHIP DROP IN 1971.....and this is the first paragraph:

"Lutheran church bodies in North America experienced membership declines in 1971 for the third year in a row, according to a compilation made by the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. As a result, total membership on the continent at the close of the year was 9,108,652 . . ."

...but that's not the significant figure. Don't get excited over that! For the writer goes on to bring to our attention that while this is the total figure for the year, it represents a decline of the previous year of 68,194 members.

Now how can I make this fact a bit more graphic for you?

Late last summer it was my privilege to address the leadership of the

Virginia Synod of the Lutheran Church in America. And speaking along this vein, I asked the Secretary of the Synod, "How many congregations do you have in your Synod?" -- that's our neighboring synod, you know, across the Potomac. He said, "171". And I asked, "What is your total communing membership?" He said, "I would say about 40,000."

....now having said that, bear this in mind -- the decline among Lutherans last year is for a total membership greater than the entire Virginia Synod.....

Can I make it a bit more graphic for you?

- - if you had 136 congregations, and in each congregation you had no less than 500 members.....136 congregations, each one having no less than 500 members - - - put them all together and you'd have a total that would approximate the number that we lost in 1971.

Now I know what some people say -- shall I give you the jargon of some men, even some men in the ministry? -- "Good riddance! If they couldn't measure up to the standard of membership, it's just as well that we don't count them.....it's just as well that we don't have them!" I can understand that kind of talk only to a degree, because I honestly believe that there ought to be such a thing as integrity in church membership. Most certainly I believe that. But you see, it's the tone that bothers me -- as though any man could allow himself a measure of elation that they've lost members by the way.

Now I should also remind you, that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He sensed at once the terrific potential that He found in twelve men, and He was willing to work with them, to recruit them, to nurture them, to bring them to the point where He could say, "Now get, and go!" If the poten-

tial in twelve men could be that great, that all Christendom at this very hour should owe it a debt, is it too much to ask you to recognize what might have been the potential, in what could have been at least 136 congregations, numbering no less than 500 each?

I know there are reasons why there's been this decline in church membership, of course I know there are reasons. I've listened to them. And I can recognize the validity of some of them. But the one that I can't fully appreciate is the emphasis that even in many quarters congregations themselves have given to what we call re-structuring society -- as though there was only one aspect of the Gospel - and that was to change social structures. We've had quite a fling of that in recent years. In fact, I remember, not too long ago addressing some of my colleagues in the Washington District of the Maryland Synod of the Lutheran Church, and they pitted me against a man who stood up to talk about the mission of the church.

In no uncertain manner he said the mission of the church is to change community structures, and that was the gist of all that he had to say. But it seems to me there has to be balance with something else --- that the mission of the church for all time remains the same, it does not vacillate....

-- and the mission of the church remains, as I think I understand it from the parting words of Jesus Christ, that men, women and children should be confronted by the fact of Jesus Christ, that there should be this personal encounter, and then, once you have the encounter, the individual who's been born again finds his place in society and makes his significant contribution. It's the renewed individual who is far better able to re-structure society.....it's the man who is regenerate who can make the

significant contribution, as well he should and must! -- to the social order of which he is part. And he dare not deny himself the responsibility of making the significant contribution to the social order.

This is not to say, by any stretch of the imagination, that the Gospel begins and ends with the individual. But it is to say if it does not begin with the individual, it does not begin!

Now I want to tell you something that you already know. I suppose I should apologize for spelling it out. There are seven days in the week.... there are four weeks in a month.....there are twelve months in a year..... ...there are fifty-two weeks in a year.....on almost any given year there are 365 days. Now. The average individual, all other things being equal -- the average individual may, I suggest, come into contact with some kind of an encounter, in varying degree, with at least five different people.

...now let me say that to you again.

On almost any given day, the average person may come into some kind of contact with five different people, varying degrees of relationship.....

Now by the end of the year it could mean that he's had some kind of a relationship with 1,725 different people! Now in all likelihood, among those people whom he will contact in one way or another, there will be those who have had some serious bout with life. That's my way of saying that perhaps they themselves, or somebody that they know, would have received the diagnosis from the surgeon: -- it's inoperable....

...it may be that this person, or somebody that he knows, even on his street or within his family circle or where he works, will have been raped, will have been victimized

in one way or another, his home burglarized....it may be that within this number of people that you may contact in one way or another, there will be those whose physical condition, emotional or social situation will be deteriorating.... And they will have discovered that their spiritual resources are absolutely inadequate....they are not equal to the demands of life that have been suddenly thrust upon them.

Now you're not forgetting, are you, that I'm talking about you, right now. I'm not addressing these words to the person who doesn't happen to be here. But I think I'm safe in assuming and fair in saying that you are someone who has known the benefit of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

-- you are someone who has been taught to pray, and it could be that somewhere along the line you've known the benefit of answered prayer, either of your own or of the prayer that somebody else has prayed for you...

-- you are someone who comes to church. You were here last Sunday...you're here today....you may be here tomorrow night.. in all likelihood you'll be here next Sunday, I honestly believe. And because this is true, when you come you're being nurtured by Word and Sacrament, you're being fed, you're being sustained. I wouldn't want to come back to this pulpit next Sunday if I didn't honestly believe that every time you came to this place you were given something to hold you in good stead against the vicissitudes of life....

Now, you are this kind of person. And you're being classified as the average person who in the course of any given day may encounter at least five other people, among whom there will always be found those whose spiritual resources are inadequate.

Now having said that, let me tell you this. You'll notice that we have a gain in membership in Saint Luke Church this year, as has been true for each preceding year. I must also tell you that as far as Lutherans at large are concerned, it takes 250 Lutherans to gain at least one new member a year. Here in Saint Luke Church we do considerably better -- it takes about a hundred of us to gain ten new members in the course of a year. Quite frankly, it would seem to me that any given hundred people ought to do better than that.

Now let me show you how much I really understand you. You say to me, "Pastor, I know what you're saying in your sermon, but I can't talk to other people about Jesus Christ -- I wouldn't know what to say!" I have to say to you very frankly -- are you silent on other matters as well? We have a way of talking about almost anything else under the sun. All right, let me show you how charitable I really am. Suppose you can't talk to somebody else about Jesus Christ -- the question is, would you allow your life to demonstrate how much Jesus Christ has come to mean to you?

I knew a chap once in his teens, who came home once whistling -- every step that he took, every gleam in his eye -- he didn't have to tell me, he was in love! The very tone of his life demonstrated it. And it made me feel better, made me appreciate all over again the fact that I've been in love. But he didn't say as much as a word. He just gave evidence to it.

Well that's my answer to you. If you say that you can't speak specifically about it. And then I must also add, maybe in the sight of God the important thing is not whether you can or not, but whether you want to or not. I would like to suggest to you that if you're worth your salt as a disciple, there ought to be at least one person on your prayer list, daily, for whom you pray for a better relationship with God.

Then I know what you also say to me -- "Pastor, I tried it once, and I failed -- I struck out!" Well maybe you did. And how well I understand that. But if I were teaching a course in salesmanship, I'd be in duty bound to tell the new salesmen how many calls they have to make on how many prospects until they get at least one profitable answer. I would hope that the Dean of Education of the University of Maryland, who is worshipping with us now, would have his moment on occasion when he might say to his young teachers, the neophytes -- "You teach your lessons, and you do it well, hoping and praying that there would be at least one responsive pupil in your entire class!" It's to this that you give yourself.

And then I should also add, granted you will fail -- the school of evangelism is the only school that I know where you get credit for having failed! -- if you've honestly tried. It isn't whether you succeed or not, it's whether you want to or not.

And then I must also tell you this: you're not the one who does it! It's the Holy Spirit who takes over. It's the Holy Spirit who gains the victory. You and I are just the instruments. And God holds us responsible as to whether or not we want to be an instrument, remember that.

If I were an artist, here again I'd give myself to painting a picture of Judgment. And I'd picture myself standing before Jesus Christ in the great moment, when my soul is laid perfectly bare....I'd have His eye cast completely on me, but only for a moment, with that inescapable look, focused upon me, then He'd lift His eye to all those people with whom I had some kind of a relationship during my lifetime....and some of them most certainly will be far, far away from the Gate of the Kingdom. And in that moment of Judgment, He might say to me, "How could you be so near, to Me, when once you were so near to them, and now they are so far away?"

Now my concluding words. I am fully aware of the fact that it was on this Sunday, the last Sunday in January, seventeen years ago, that I walked this sacred aisle for the first time and came to the pulpit. In checking the hymns to be sung on that Sunday and the hymns that were scheduled for today, I've discovered that one of them is the same. The hymn that we're going to sing at the conclusion of the service today ~~is~~ was sung on that Sunday in 1957. Why do I refer to it? -- I'd never heard that hymn sung before. It was here that I heard it sung for the first time. It's an old hymn -- I suppose it's about 270 years old. But I never heard it until I heard it sung in Saint Luke.

Jesus Christ has been around for a long time. The message of Jesus Christ is an old, old message. There's a parable here. Jesus Christ has been around for a long time....but there are some people who might never hear His song sung until they hear it sung by the people of Saint Luke Church.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ONE STORY: TWO HOUSES"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Many a month has passed since I first heard those words, and they continue to ring in my ears -- I share them with you now -- I can only repeat them as I heard it:

"A fine chap, y'know, kind and decent -- religious
and all that . . . "

It was a bit of the conversation that I had with a Britisher during that delightful experience, summer a year ago.....

"A fine chap, y'know, kind and decent -- religious
and all that"

The longer I think about those words, the more I am inclined to think that there is something wrong. For the implication is made, you see, that only religious people are kind and decent. The closing phrase does not always necessarily follow -- 'A fine chap, y'know, kind and decent, religious and all that. . . ' Those of us who are religious are in duty bound to be honest. And when we are honest, we are forced to admit that people who are religious have no monopoly whatsoever on kindness, and decency.

It's quite popular these days to take pot-shots at the church. There was a day when some of us seemed to have been protected a bit. But not any longer. From almost any source the blow can come, and there are people who back us against the wall, and they say, "Come on, now! What about so-and-so --- as fine a chap as I've ever met! He's kind and he's decent, but he

hasn't the slightest interest in religion."

...it wouldn't be so bad, you see, if they'd stop at that point, but then they go on with that proverbial finger, you see, and press it into the stomach, and say,

"If a man can be kind and decent without being religious, why then bother with religion?"

Really now, a good question! And a good question deserves a good answer. And you and I ought to be able to give a good answer to a good question like that. Let's see what we can do with it.

To begin with, root and ground yourself in Scripture. It will hold you in good stead to recall those words spoken by our Blessed Lord. They constitute verses 24 and 25 of the 7th chapter of the Good News according to Matthew. Jesus was telling a story....he was telling a story about look-alike houses. There they were, as He detailed them -- from appearances' sake they were very, very much alike. But then, Jesus said, there was a storm, and the rains descended....the winds came...the floods came. One of the look-alike houses collapsed, fell down. The other remained firm. Says our Blessed Lord in these verses to which we referred:

"He that heareth these sayings of mine
and doeth them is like a wise man who
built his house upon a rock. And the
floods came, and it fell not . . ."

...now you're not forgetting, we're going back to this question --

"I've known many a man who is kind and decent, but he never so much as darkened the doorway of a church, and as far as I know, he has no intention of doing so -- but he's kind and decent . . ."

Now what does religion do for a man? If a man can be kind and decent without being religious, why be religious?

Let me remind you what I've told some of you before. I think it's quite pertinent now. Harry Emerson Fosdick was a great preacher in his day -- perceptive, astute, popular. He took a trip to the Middle East, and someone who knew he was coming made arrangements for him to speak in Chapel at one of the great universities -- was it the University of Cairo? -- I've quite forgotten -- but this is a cross-road, you see, not only of civilization but also of the great religions of the world.

....the man who was to introduce him said, "Dr. Fosdick, I have a bit of advice to give you: this student body before whom you will speak this morning is made up of a number of different religious complexions... Q ...we're quite a cosmopolitan group. You'll be introduced as a Christian. Now some of them are quite sensitive to the fact that Christians sometimes think of themselves as having an exclusive grip on God! And if in your remarks you give them to understand that you're here to proselytize, they may turn you off."

Dr. Fosdick, I've already told you, was very astute and shrewd and perceptive. That was the only word that he needed. So having been introduced, at the proper time, he stood up and looked out over the student body. He began masterfully with these words, which do not in any way constitute a betrayal to his Christian commitment. He said, "I have not come here this morning to ask any man to change his religion. But I have come to ask the question: Is your religion, whatever it is, changing you?"

...and I dare say Dr. Fosdick could have gone on -- whether he did or not I don't know, to say:

"And if it is changing you, how is it changing you?"

...for I dare say the acid test of all religion is in what kind of a person it produces. Kindness and decency are never just enough. Religion does introduce something else. Religion introduces, if you please, the stabilizing

influence. Religion, if you please, does provide the foundation upon which a man can stand.....

...religion does introduce the fact of God -- unchange-
able....unmoveable....

....religion does introduce the fact of Jesus Christ, who
says, "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you..
Lo, I am with you always -- "

...religion does introduce a man to Jesus Christ who says,
"My peace I will give to you....My peace I will not take away!"

...religion does introduce a man to the fact of Jesus
Christ who says, "Don't be afraid! . . "

...religion does introduce a man, the Christian religion,
that is, to the fact of Jesus Christ who says, "The Holy
Spirit will come to be your comforter . . "

(you remember your days in Latin, don't you? --
that word comfort means 'to be able to stand
with strength!' . . .)

People who are decent and kind, who may not have any interest in religion,
can be look-alike with those who are religious. The appearance may be the
same, just as there were two houses that looked alike, but when the storm
came, and the strain and the stress, the one withstood the ravages, the
other did not.

If I did not know Jesus Christ, if I had yet to be introduced to Him,
I think I would be drawn to religion if for no other reason than this: to
provide something more than morality, to provide the stabilizing influence,
and there again your Latin holds you in good stead . . . the word 'religion'
properly understood from the Latin means religio -- something to hold you to

....and that's exactly what religion does. It holds you to something over and above and beyond yourself, by which you are stabilized, enervated and motivated, strengthened and encouraged.

In company with some of you, when we first moved into the Washington area, we said we're going to do a number of things at the very beginning because the longer we stay, the seldom we'll get around to doing it. So I presume it was that first weekend, or was it the second weekend, the four of us went down to Washington, into the District of Columbia. And one of the first places I wanted to visit was the Library of Congress, to feast my eyes on those precious documents -- the Declaration of Independence and the copy of the Constitution.

I've recalled many times since then that during World War II those documents were not to be found in the Library of Congress. With the formidable threat of that great conflict, anything could have happened in the Nation's Capital, and so they made proper preparation. These are prized things, you see -- so they properly crated them and carted them off to Ft. Knox in Kentucky, where they could be carefully defended and protected in a time of crisis.

Well, you and I can do that sort of thing with precious possessions, to hold ourselves in good stead against a moment of crisis we diversify our investments.....against the trying tomorrow that could come we try to make ourselves secure with a pension plan. Some folks go to church regularly to gather strength against that tomorrow that could be vexing and irritating. Well, this is the point of it, my friend -- our things, you see, we can build fortresses around things....we can put certificates in safe deposit boxes. But there's one thing a man can't do, he can't put himself in moth-balls...and he

can't put around him a kind of invincible shield, because sooner or later every single one of us is exposed to the elements that bring the strain and the stress. And when these things do come, as they are most certain to occur, man needs to be stabilized, firmly grounded and rooted -- to have a foundation that will not give way. And this is exactly what religion does, and the Christian religion in particular.

You see, it's never enough just to be kind and decent and moral. A man may subscribe to the basic principles of morality -- I may even begin with my Hebrew tradition, which is a part of all Christian faith, and you and I subscribe to the Ten Commandments. We know what is right in God's sight. But it doesn't necessarily follow that we will do what we know is right! The Christian religion introduces, then, the stabilizing and the motivating factor by which the very power of God is made available to us, so that we might withstand the pressure and the strain and the stress.

In company with some of you I have read and I have hung my head in shame to think that it was someone from our state who was chastized and rebuked by a judge. Given the honor to serve in the United States Senate, now to have his career clouded. It does not behoove any of us to point the finger of condemnation - - - some folks have never stolen ten thousand dollars because they've never had ten thousand dollars within reach where they might have stolen it. None of us knows what we might do exactly if the temptations were as strong for us as they've been to other people....that isn't the point. The point is that the judge could have said to him, "For shame! You had so much going for you -- and this, now, is the net result!" Well this could happen to any of us - - - not that we don't know what we ought to do, but to be able to have the power and the strength by which to pull it off.

No man can be good on his own. No one can be kind and decent and compassionate always. There's a figure of speech we use much these days -- we call it compassion fatigue -- some of us have been told so long how compassionate we ought to be, and we're sick and tired of trying to be compassionate. We run out of steam unless we're constantly renewed and restored. And that's exactly what the power of God and the person of Jesus Christ does for us. And when the burden of sin floors us, it's the strong and redeeming hand of Jesus Christ that enables us to stand in the moment of Judgment....

"Fine chap, y'know -- kind and decent --

religious and all that . . . "

...but it doesn't necessarily follow....in the time of strain and stress a man can forget to be kind and decent, and compassionate, unless always and underneath there remain the girding and strengthening hand of God. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
February 4, 1973

Would you please be seated.

And now in our worship experience, it's time to pray. Sometimes when we pray, we pray in generalities, which is quite alright. Occasionally we ought to pray quite specifically. If you'll allow the suggestion, we ought to pray now specifically for (1) the visitor or the friend in our midst, who may be here today for the very first time, who may have been here before and has returned. We should pray that this person should be made aware of the fact that he is God's child, and that God has a blessing for him that He wants to give him right now, even before the Benediction is pronounced. So we should pray for the visitor or the friend within our gates.

Then, little do you realize it, but there are people who would give very much if they could be here, but they're denied that privilege. They are sick. Right now, at this very hour, we have members of this congregation who are patients in George Washington University Hospital, Suburban Hospital, Holy Cross Hospital, the Washington Adventist Hospital, Prince George's County General Hospital at Cheverly, and the hospital at Sykesville. We must now think of them, and we must think of those who minister to their needs. Let us pray . . .

HEAVENLY FATHER, We're grateful that we have not come here alone, that for whatever may be the reason, our visitors and friends are here to share the hour with us. We want you to know, Heavenly Father, that we're glad they came. For all that we propose here in this place is never for the people of this parish alone, but for anyone who may come to give praise and honor to God, and who may wait long enough to feel the gentle pressure of God's claim upon his soul, so that he may live as an effective witness in the world. So we pray for our visitors and for our friends.

HEAVENLY FATHER, We pray for those

"TEMPTATION - AS OUR LORD KNEW IT"

O GOD, Our Heavenly Father, for a little while in this place we want to talk about something that's very personal. We need all the help that we can get to understand it. Now Your, Son, our Blessed Lord, knows more about it than we do, even as He knows each one of us better than we happen to know ourselves. We'd like to learn from Him, right now. Amen.

With whatever sanctified imagination you have, suppose you look at it this way -- the Master of the small group took Andrew aside, and He said, "Andrew, pass the word along, if you don't mind -- it's tonight that I'd like to get the fellows together. There's something that I'd like to tell them. And, Andrew, by the way, make sure that you get the word to your brother, Simon Peter! I don't want him to miss this meeting. In fact, I want them all there! Let there be no misunderstanding at this point...

...and if you see Thomas, tell Thomas that I have reason to believe that he'll find the meeting helpful, too. And I sure hope that Judas Iscariot will show up....."

Well, they had their meeting. And I think it might have gone in this way.....

Jesus said to them, "I've been wanting to talk to you about something for a long time. Now what I'm going to tell you tonight may come as a surprise, but you've got to hear it! Now let me clear some of the ground right away.

"I know that some of you have a very good opinion of me, and I'm

glad that you do, I'm grateful for it. Now because some of you think as highly of me as you do, what I am about to tell you, I say again, will come as a surprise . . .

I want to tell you about my temptation. I'm human, you see, as human as you are.....

...you get hungry -- so do I!

...you get thirsty -- so do I!

...you get tired? -- so do I!

...you've been tempted? . . . so have I! -- I want to tell you about my experience. Now when I tell you about my experience you've got to remember when and how it happened.....

Just before the temptation experience to which I'm going to refer, the most wonderful thing in my life happened. I was about 30 years of age.....and I was right there when all of a sudden I heard the voice from Heaven say, it was the voice of my Heavenly Father -- just as clear as I can hear you speaking to me right now -- and the voice said, referring to me, 'You're my beloved son! -- you please me!' ...and right then and there I knew that I was God's man....right then and there I knew that I was meant to be as God in this world and to live as God in your midst! It was a tremendous experience!

But then you know what? Right after it happened, I was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and there the Devil tried to get a hold of me. That's what I want to talk to you about. It wasn't just for fifteen minutes....it wasn't just for an hour...it wasn't just for a day or for a night . . . mind you, it was for forty days! and forty nights I was there in the wilderness, all by myself. And the Devil did his best to get his toe-hold on me....he kept com-

ing back again and again, trying this and trying that! It really was something! But I'm happy to tell you that I got the best of him...and when it was all over, the angels of my Heavenly Father came to me to console me and to comfort me . . . "

"Now I've called you together because I know that one of these days I'm not going to be around. And one of these days, here on earth, all of these things that I've been telling you about the Kingdom are going to be put pretty much in your hands, and I'm going to count on you very, very heavily. As the Heavenly Father said to me, 'You're my man! -- so I'm saying to each one of you....

...Matthew!...Andrew!...Bartholomew!...

....Thomas!...John!...James!...Judas!....

..I'm telling each one of you: You're my man! -- and I'm counting on you!

"But, understand this! -- the Devil knows you're my man, too. And you're on the Devil's list. He's going to do his best to get you just as he tried his best to get me. But I want you to understand very clearly -- you don't have to fail the test. You can give the Devil his marching orders. I did. And I'll tell you how I was able to do it -- I was able to do it because I never took my eye off of the purposes of God for my life. I kept reminding myself of that "

Well, with whatever sanctified imagination you have, picture it taking place like that -- Jesus, the triumphant one, trying to pass on to the encouraging words to His friends who were going to be subjected to temptation. Now on the basis of this I want to share with you some observations:

Number 1 - Temptation is an experience that is common to every man.

No man escapes it. The Bible for it -- the experience of

your own life for it. A man is a fool who may allow himself to think that he isn't being tempted, and that no one is above temptation, not even God's precious Son, Jesus Christ, escaped it.

Observation Number 2 - The temptation experience is always a very personal thing, and you cannot send anybody else to represent you on the battlefield of the Devil. I'd be very, very happy if one of you would volunteer to take my place when the Devil comes around to give me a tough time. And as much as some of you who might not have the temptations that I have, out of the goodness of your heart would like to take my place, you can't do it! I've got to have my own round with the Devil. It's always a personal encounter. And as much as I love some people, and I think I literally would give my right hand to take their place in their time of temptation, for their temptation doesn't faze me, yet I can't do it! It's always a personal matter.

The third observation - In this whole matter of temptation, there is no such thing as a once-and-forever deal with the Devil. 'Twould be wonderful if that could be true. But you simply go from one battle to the next, you simply go from one encounter to the next. Take the life of our Blessed Lord as a good example. Here He has been telling us what happened when He went into the wilderness. But that wasn't His last encounter with the Devil! Even to the very end, when He's in the Garden of Gethsemane, you have a right to understand this as a temptation!-- when He's on His knees

and He's trying to tell the Heavenly Father, "Are you sure there isn't some other way? -- do I have to go through it now?".....if that isn't a temptation, I don't know what is! -- to try to get God to change His mind! is the Devil's way of getting into our system. And it could be that when our Good Friday preacher comes this year, a grand and noble soul, by the way, it could be that when he comes to talk to us about one of those Seven Words from the Cross, he may lend his own personal interpretation to "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" as an evidence that even in the moment of death the Devil was trying to get Jesus Christ to have doubts as to the all-prevailing hand of God. The shadow of the Devil is cast against every one of us, even to the very Gate of Paradise.

Another observation, if you please - that when the Devil comes to tempt us, I don't think he bothers overmuch with our weak points. I used to think a great deal about that. But why should the Devil worry about our weak point? -- he knows that, he already has that pretty well lined up. The Devil's greater concern is always with our strong point -- where we feel noblest and where we feel most secure. That's where the Devil girds himself. Victory is always greater, you see, when you can tackle the strongest man. The hour of victory is always sweetest when you know that you've been able to get the man at the point where he thought he couldn't fail! So whenever you have an understanding about temptation, don't overlook that aspect of it -- the Devil

sets his sight on your stronger, your nobler part. This I most certainly believe.

Then I think Jesus Christ told them, when He wound up His whole conversation, "I'm able to tell you what I'm telling you because I know you're going to be tempted and I want you to know that you don't have to give in to temptation. It can be conquered! And maybe that's why the Heavenly Father allowed me to be tempted, because then I'm in a position where I can talk to you about my personal experience, and give you the necessary encouragement."

I was delighted -- out of the corner of my eye to discover, at the 9:45 service, that a certain person happened to be present. Years ago I knew his grandfather, and I know his father. Now I'm his pastor. Ever since I've been his pastor, bless his soul, the Devil has been giving him a tough time, and occasionally I've been called at strange and odd hours to help him. About ten days ago he called me on the phone. I could tell by the very tone of his voice! -- "Pastor, this time I have good news -- by the grace of God and by the help of some friends I think I'm getting it licked! And I've reached the point now where I want to help somebody else in his battle -- " Tuesday morning, he and I are going to talk. And one of the purposes of that conversation is to discover ways by which he might be of help to other people.

.....that's why Jesus Christ allows us to be tempted, so that we can prove to people that by the help of God we can pass the test.

Now one other thing, if you don't mind. While one speaks generally about temptation, and we're all exposed to the temptation experience, the specifics of the temptation experience are always tailored according to you, and to me. What could be my temptation might never face you. And what could

make you almost vulnerable to the Devil's grasp would be of no interest to me at all. The specifics of temptation are always tailored according to you! The experience itself is something common to all mankind.

So Jesus Christ gathered them together....the opportunities that He'd have to talk to them would be limited from here on. I think there were moments when they remembered. That's one reason why we have the Cross on the altar - - not the Cross with the form of a dying man, but the Cross that's resplendent -- victorious -- because even in the moment of death when the Devil tried for the soul of Jesus Christ, He did not yield to temptation.

Oh, let there be no misunderstanding, I've lived long enough now to have to admit that if I could live in a world without the Devil, I don't think I'd choose it, because whenever the Devil draws near I recognize all over again the power and the purpose of God for my life, and the grace and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Said Martin Luther, "You may not be able to keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair."

There used to be an old Gospel hymn -- listen now, you're going to hear the tone of it shortly -- it goes something like this:

"Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you
Some other to win"
Fight manfully onward,
Dark passions subdue (Bryce Redington Sings)
Look ever to Jesus --
He will carry you through."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TEMPTATION - The Examination"

(Matthew 4:1)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Let me begin by telling you that he was every inch a Christian gentleman. Now as to his physical appearance, he was short in stature, he was trim in figure, he was white-haired, he was ruddy-complexioned -- and he had something of a trace of a moustache. His appearance was benign, to say the least. And at first glance the average college student in the incoming class probably thought that this professor would be a push-over.

But then came that day, as it always does -- and occasionally without warning -- the surprise examination. His students after a while memorized the pat way by which he put it:

"We will now engage in a short written test.

I trust that every member of the class will be perfectly fair and honest, looking neither to the right nor to the left....please sit two seats apart."

*Neither seeking
help - nor
giving help -*

The awesome realization had come....he wasn't to be a push-over.

But that wasn't nearly as frightening as that moment of loneliness would set in when then and there you realized that you could not so much as cast a furtive glance, you could not consult anyone -- there you were frozen to your seat with that blue book in front of you....left all alone.

And that, I presume, is what testing is meant to be: when a man, all by himself, is put to the test -- there comes invariably, you know, a time

when no one can take your place for you. You are the one that must endure the examination. As much as you may like, you cannot send somebody else to the physician's room and somebody else's body will be probed and examined in your behalf. By the same token there comes that awesome moment when the final examination of the soul takes place, and as much as you may wish to do it, you cannot send anybody else to represent you before Almighty God....the awesome moment, when a man realizes he's left alone.

I would be less than honest if I did not tell you that any preacher worth his salt looks back after the sermon that he's just preached, and wishes that for this reason or that reason he might have emphasized this point a bit better, or by a better choice of words might have enunciated the truth in a clearer fashion. It's in that manner and that mood that I come to you now in this, the series of Sunday morning sermons during Lent on the general theme of "The Temptation Experience in The Life of Our Blessed Lord" -- that I tell you before the sermon, the last in the series, is preached next Sunday -- I want at this time and in this place to ascertain as best I can in your behalf that we have in clear focus what ought to be understood before we go any farther.

Let it be clearly understood now that in the temptation experience of our Blessed Lord He was left alone. Now that is better understood when you realize the meaning of the text:

"Then he was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. . "

I myself, in keeping with some of you who have traveled to Palestine, have seen something of that wilderness. I first saw it from the air as we hovered above it, heading toward the great city of Jerusalem. It's as barren and as desolate as any place here on earth. It isn't simply a matter of being desert, but there are crags and precipices, as though somebody had taken

a huge lump of clay and wrinkled it, and then tossed it somewhere on the face of the earth and allowed it to flatten out in whatever manner it might see fit to flatten.....no sign of vegetation. My Arab guide told me that it would not be uncommon for any person to wander into the wilderness stretch and become completely lost within a matter of an hour or two.

For forty days and forty nights Jesus Christ was in the wilderness area... It's a stretch of some fifteen miles wide and thirty-five miles long -- by Himself. I cannot make too much of that for you. For there comes a time when a man must needs be left alone, to wrestle with his own soul, to get things in proper perspective.

I know what you tell me, of course I do -- that there are some people who suffer from the fact that they're left too much alone. There are some people who go stark mad because, being left alone, the walls begin to crumble in on top of them. I also know that a distinguished religious philosopher has said that religion, properly understood, is what a man does with his solitariness, as though the fact of solitariness was an absolute necessity. Would you be willing to believe me if I were to tell you that your life could be vastly transformed if you could keep sacrosanct a half-hour each day, in which you could be left alone. It takes a bit of doing, even for those who are participating in the Christian Life Style discipline here in Saint Luke. to find fifteen minutes, just a quarter-of-an-hour out of each day, when they are left alone.

What really happens when a person is left alone - - ?

...he sees himself as otherwise he does not see himself

...he sees other people as otherwise he does not see them

...he sees God as otherwise he does not see God.....

...the ancient injunction remains -- "Be still - - ".....and then you know God. And to be still means to withdraw, to separate, to be by yourself.

It's an awesome thing to have nothing but yourself on your hands, a very necessary thing. I suggest to each one of you the amazing thought that whatever deficiency you may have in your life, it could be improved is you had a minimum of a half-hour -- hopefully an hour each day, when you could be left alone.....left alone, of course I mean, in the presence of God. Because it serves no purpose if you're going to be basically introspective. If you're going to talk to yourself you can't always trust the answers that you give to your own questions. But the divine factor must always be present, and that's exactly what happened in the temptation experience in the life of our Blessed Lord - - He was left alone in order to allow the divine perspective to prevail.

I'm not so sure that you'd be equal to it, but suppose it were possible for you to be left alone in a room for a span of four hours....no radio, no television....blank walls....bare floor, and only the thing that you're seated on, whatever it may be....no television....no knock at the door...

....for four hours you do nothing but think, meditate,
reflect, pray.....

...if that wouldn't be a test of your soul,
I don't know what would be! Even if it happened only once a year, what a salutary thing it could be.

Now let's go back again and get the thing in proper focus. Jesus Christ is about to begin His public ministry, and before He begins it He's left alone for forty days and forty nights, in a barren place, for a testing period - - in which He discovered as He had never discovered before exactly who He was, and what He was meant to do, and by the power of God how He'd be able to do it! For you see, properly understood, the most wonderful thing that happens when you're left alone is to discover God! - - in whose image you have been made.

The second thing that we must understand before we go any farther in this study of the temptation experience in the life of our Blessed Lord is this: that that temptation experience occurred immediately after the Divine Impratur.....just before this Jesus Christ had heard the voice from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" -- Jesus Christ has just heard what God thought about Him, how God felt about Him. The tremendous realization that the smile of God is resting upon you is quite a thing to experience.

And I suppose that one can also say that any temptation, or rather, testing, experience has to deal with our prize gifts and skills, and not necessarily with our weaknesses. You may remember, I told you in the first sermon that the Devil doesn't much care about your weak points. He's already geared himself, gained admission in that direction. But his greater concern is in your strengths, your gifts and your skills. It's a good thing, my friend, to sit down and to take an inventory of your soul and to discover your strong points -- honestly it is! -- and every one of us has certain strong features and certain strong characteristics, endowments, talents. And then in this testing period which God allows a man has to make the decision as to what he's going to do with them. That's why Jesus could put the Devil to the march -- because the Devil was always trying to get Jesus Christ to use the gifts that God had given Him in a cheap way...to exploit people. And God doesn't give us gifts and skills for that purpose, not to exploit but to help! ...and to minister to the needs of people.

Now, when Jesus recited His temptation experience to His disciples, He told them this in order that they might be held in good stead on their level. Now as an example, if you don't mind, some of you have charisma -- we're just drawn toward you -- we have a warm feeling toward you -- very easily, and without much subtlety you get us to think in your direction.....this is a

precious gift! But a man has to make the decision in the time of testing -- will he use this charismatic quality to exploit people? or to allow them to benefit by it?

...some of you have a gift with words. It's a wonderful thing to be able to communicate with somebody else just by using words to get them to see something by your choice of words, the way you use them, the way you handle them -- even the very inflection in your voice. This is a gift, if not a practiced art. But then the time of testing comes, you see, when a man ought to ask himself the question: what will I do with this gift? will I use it to communicate truth? or will I use it to work myself out of a difficult situation?....because there are some people who can talk themselves out of anything! Watch out for them. It's an abuse of a precious gift.

We'll start enumerating for yourself in whatever direction you wish to go -- surely you may discover some gift that you have. And the one thing that all of us have in common is the gift of life, and the blessing of a brand new day every twenty-four hours. And in the moment of testing the decision has to be made -- how will you use it? what will you do with it? Whenever you think of the temptation experience in the life of our Blessed Lord, remember this occurred as He began His public ministry, and there and then through the temptation experience the decision was made as to what He would do with God's precious gifts. For properly understood, temptation is testing.

I am numbered among those who had the good fortune to go to Camp Nawakwa in its beginning years. And in the three camping seasons that I spent there I felt I was as close to Heaven as I've ever been anywhere on earth. As an impressionable lad I responded to those wonderful Christian people who served as advisors and teachers and counselors. Little did I realize it, that first

camping season, that every single one of us campers was being evaluated, and before the camping season would be over, the counselor, the cabin leaders, faculty member -- each one sat down and gave his personal evaluation of every single camper. And then this was brought together in a statement and in a diagram and put in a sealed envelope. And then the last day in camp each of us was sent out by himself, hopefully not within sight of somebody else, but we scattered ourselves over that ample acreage of Hanaheva, and sat down for three-quarters of an hour and looked at what somebody had said to us were our gifts and our skills.....and then we were being challenged by God until we came back to camp next year, to use these gifts and skills to His honor and to His glory.

Let me go back and tell you what I said earlier: your life could be transformed, my friend, if you allowed yourself each day some period of solitariness, in which your soul was being tested, so that the net result would be that once you emerged from that period of time, there would be no question as to the kind of person God intends you to be, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you could become. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 22, 1973

"WHILE IT WAS STILL DARK"

John 20:1

GRACE, Mercy and peace, in the name
of Jesus Christ, the Resurrected and
Ever-living Lord. Amen.

Professor Charles Beard, an eminent historian, was once asked the question that many of us are wont to put to people such as he: Just what is the lesson that we learn from history?

Historian Beard, fully prepared, as though he had been reading our minds, waiting for us to ask him the question, answered without delay. Said he, there are four things that history teaches:

- (1) Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad with power
- (2) The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine
- (3) The bee fertilizes the flower that it robs
- (4) When the night is the darkest, the stars shine the brightest.

Not pretending to be a preacher and speaking from the secular world, the historian is simply saying what we Christians have been saying all along the line: that evil is self-defeating, that God has the last word, that love is stronger than hate, good is greater than evil - - that we can believe those things even in the face of the greatest difficulty.

Now for the text for this meditation, written in the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to John, it is the 21st verse:

"Then on the first day of the week cometh
Mary Magdalene, early while it was still
dark, to the tomb . . ."

Mary came while it was still dark. For this, too, is an inescapable fact of

life -- the darkness will always set in. Evil is still the second most powerful force in the universe, and it is forever operative.

Some of you remember how I told you on more than one occasion that one of the things I wanted most to see in the Holy Land was the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. I think sometimes I wanted to go there before I wanted to go to the Bethlehem manger. I think sometimes I wanted to go there even before I wanted to go to the Garden Tomb. Don't ask me why. But to Nazareth I went.

...And as I stood outside that carpenter's shop I visualized what a painter one time put on his canvas -- the carpenter's apprentice, who had become the carpenter's partner.....at about thirty years of age, who is about to turn his back on the carpenter's shop for the last time, never again to return....

...He's swept the floor of the shavings....He's put the saw and the adze back on the bench....now He's about to face the world and to become the wandering preacher. It's near the end of the day, and He stands there for a moment or two reflecting upon the threshold of the door...and for some unexplainable reason He braces Himself against the sides of the doorway. And as He does that the setting sun casts the shadow of the Cross upon the carpenter's floor.....

He was the personification of all that's good -- you know that, don't you? God is love. And this carpenter's son was God-come-to-us-in-the-flesh -- He was never meant to hurt anyone. He was meant to only do good. In fact, one man who remembered His life summed it all up magnificently and said, "He went about doing good." But always the shadow -- the inescapable fact of life is this: the shadow of darkness will always fall, at some time, and upon someone, somewhere. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if this would be the only thing that you and I could say about life?

Easter spells the lie to this, as though this were the only thing to be said. Deliberately, of course, when we came here on Good Friday, we left the church in a very somber mood -- deliberately, because we need to remember that Jesus Christ did die. He did suffer the curse of darkness, He did bear the brunt of evil. He did not escape it. But this is not the end of the Christian message!

My heart goes out to even such a learned man as Thomas Jefferson, who could never get himself around to admit that he could believe in miracles. He recognized the Scriptures, of course, and one day he formulated his own copy of the New Testament.....and with a pair of scissors in hand he went and cut out all references to the miracles. And his story of Jesus Christ, even as he gleaned it from the Scriptures, ends with the words: "Then placed they the body of Jesus of Nazareth in the tomb, and rolled the stone to the door of the sepulchre." - - - wouldn't it be a terrible thing if that's the only thing that you and I could say? -- that the darkness had set in, that evil had claimed its victim.

But you caught the subtlety of the text, didn't you? - - "And while it was still dark" -- Mary was drawn to the grave. Mary was accustomed to darkness. The Magdalene was a woman who thrived in the shadows. But it's this woman who one day had met Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Kalil Kebran, the Lebanese, has done a masterful thing for us in what he's written about Mary Magdalene and her encounter by Jesus Christ. Somewhere Kalil Kebran puts it beautifully when He said to her, "All men have loved you for themselves - - - I love you for yourself." No one had ever spoken to her like that before. In the dark night of sin He placed a candle in her heart. And she never forgot it. Now, while the darkness had set in and they'd taken away her Lord, she was drawn by the darkness, she was drawn through the darkness, to the grave.

"While It Was Still Dark" (4)

When the night is the darkest the stars can shine the brightest. It only takes one victory to discourage you from believing in all the defeats. Professor Charles Hocking used to tell his students, no matter how much negative evidence you amass, as soon as you discover one positive truth all the negative evidence is as nought. With Mary Magdalene all the evil that she had encountered in life was now as nought when she remembered that Jesus Christ had come her way. The story of Robinson Crusoe is the story of a man whose life was changed when one day he discovered on his island the footprints of another man who was going his way. This is the story of Easter -- God coming to us as a man, to where we are, going His way and drawing us after Him. And even while it is still dark, because we have met Him, the positive truth of Jesus Christ negates all that otherwise would hinder us. This I believe to be true.

Last evening we introduced the Easter season in Saint Luke Church with that very meaningful Easter Eve Vigil. I'd like to think that a divine impulse did it -- when it came time to pronounce the benediction the officiating minister suggested that when the Pastors left the Nave the entire congregation would follow them, down the center aisle, go outside the doors on this side of the Nave, then go through the enclosed porch and gather outside on the sidewalk -- it was a perfect night for it -- and there the Pastors would greet personally the worshippers. As one of my good friends came down the steps I spontaneously said to him, "The Lord is risen!" -- and I startled him. And he startled me by his response. I said to him, "The Lord is risen!" -- and he said to me: "I hope so!"

And that's exactly why you and I are here, for both reasons: either we believe He did....or we wish it were true. For God made us with eternal yearnings, and this makes all the difference in the world.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 22, 1973

"HE IS NOT HERE - - "

GRACE be unto you from Jesus
Christ, our resurrected and ever-
living Lord. Amen.

Now a man spends his money I presume is none of your business, nor is it any of my business. But I would be less than truthful if I did not admit in your presence that there are times when I become infuriated when I discover that a man is spending his money radically. Now that I am envious, but I dare say because I am resentful. Let me tell you about two such cases.

- - why I went back the second time to see it I'll never quite tell you, but I did. Out there in Kansas there's a man, whose name I don't know, spent his entire fortune trying to commemorate the love that he had for his wife. She had died and he glued himself to the past....

...he retained a sculptor from another country who came and carved out of stone a series of different settings related to different periods in their lives. As far as her life was concerned, he began with her childhood...

...had an entire series of stonework indicating that

...then he had another setting in stone, three or four different pieces, representing her early adolescence....

...the third series represented her young adulthood and her falling in love with him.....

...and then the fourth series represented their years together.

...and then he topped it off with a last setting, and this was a characterization of himself, the lonely one, alongside an empty seat.

He spent his entire fortune for this kind of stonework. The townspeople used

to tell me that he'd go out there on a Sunday afternoon when the weather was right, and just watch the people who came to look at what he had done. I should also add, the townspeople were likewise infuriated at the way he spent his money, because in his declining years they had to keep him in the county poor-house.

The second case is a man who had more money than brains, according to a novelist, spent his fortune retaining a staff of architects, and he commissioned them to go to the Holy Land, and they were to perpetrate this type, this diabolical thing -- they were to take tools and dig and dig and look and look.....for presumably the bones of Jesus Christ. The evil was so perpetrated that they came upon a grave and they falsified an inscription. And the inscription indicated the fact that here had been placed the bones of Jesus Christ. Now this man with more money than brains was simply trying to refute the Christian declaration of faith that was given to us by the angel in the opening moments of our service today -- "He is not here - - He is risen!"

Do I have to tell you that the cardinal truth of the Christian religion lies in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Last evening we began the Easter season in Saint Luke Church with the Easter Eve Vigil at 8:00 o'clock. I'd like to think that it was a divine impulse that laid hold upon the officiating minister because when it came time for the benediction he suggested that the congregation follow the two pastors out to the central aisle through these doors back there to my right, through the enclosed porch, and then gather themselves outside -- the night was perfect for it -- and there as the carillon would ring the bells, the Easter message, the Pastors would greet the worshippers, and after that was done the benediction would be pronounced.

It worked out very well. But what I am about to relate to you is this: that as one of the parishioners came down, I startled him as I stood

there on the pavement, and he was coming down the steps -- spontaneously, with a heart filled with joy, I looked him straight in the eye and I said, "The Lord is risen!" - - - and he startled me by his response: "I hope so!" Specifically, that's what has brought us here today. Any person who is here on Easter Day is here for one of two reasons: either he believes the Lord has risen, and he comes to celebrate that fact.....or he comes here wishing it were so.

Now, Easter is God's message to us that God has no such thing on His agenda as unfinished business. God is always moving on to something better. God has so ordained life that the next chapter, to be written under His guidance, always is intended to be a better chapter.

Now you and I may have our moments when we are inclined to think that life is sordid, and evil has won its way. But this is not true. Easter spells the lie to all this. By deliberate design -- you may as well know it, those of us who are familiar with the Easter truth allow the kind of thing that happens on Good Friday.....had you been here, you may remember how we left the church, as though we were walking out in a funeral procession, as though we had just put a man to rest in the grave.....because He did die, you know -- He did suffer the brunt of evil. The Devil did have his way with the people who crucified Him. It was as black as all that.

But God did not ordain us to live in a world with only the sunset. God ordained us to live in a world where there would be a sunrise. God did not ordain us to live in a world where evil would have the last word. God goes on to have the last word. And that's exactly what happened when the Marys were drawn to the empty grave. They were confronted by an angel who said, "He is not here -- He is risen, even as He said -- now go and tell!"

Averill Harriman, bless his soul, distinguished diplomat that he is, was once asked when he first went to France how he was coming along with the

French language and he said, "Quite well, except I'm having trouble with my verbs." And I presume anyone who has ever studied a foreign language finds himself eventually in some kind of difficulty with the verbs. I suggest to you that in the realm of religion we're always having trouble with our verbs.

But God knows how to handle verbs.

God is forever doing somethingGod is forever creating something

...God is forever loving someone....God is forever forgiving some-

one....God is forever, by the Holy Spirit, drawing somebody

toward Him.....God is forever going about setting right some-

thing that's been wrong.....God is forever going about finish-

ing our unfinished business.

Now you daren't forget that in the Easter story. The great thing about the Easter message is God's using verbs. The angel simply did not say, "He is not here" -- the angel, true to the One who sent him, says, "Go -- and tell" God is forever directing us, motivating us, empowering us, enlightening us, redeeming us.

And that's just about where this brief meditation is going to end, except to suggest that if you might have a hurried feeling about this service we don't apologize for it, because Easter has about it the dynamic quality. Those three women did not tarry, they moved quickly down this aisle. And honestly, we ought to move quickly away from this place today, too..(I'm speaking now in parables) -- because within an hour from now, if I were a gambling man I'd be willing to wager that you're going to confront someone who needs to know the benefit of the Easter message. We're surrounded by people who have no hope -- you're surrounded by people who are imprisoned in the misery of this present world. By the dynamic of the living Christ who is alive in your soul -- pass the word on! go! tell! That's the way you found out, and see the difference it's made in your life!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 29, 1973

"GUESS WHO CAME TO DINNER"

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ, our risen Triumphant Lord.
Amen.

Luke 24

Ask any youngster who's ever been to Sunday School to tell you the Easter story, and invariably he'll tell you about people who went to a garden, to visit a grave, and they found it empty. In all likelihood when he talks about Easter he talks about what happened on the morning of Easter Day. But not to be overlooked is what happened on the evening of that Easter Day. And on this, the First Sunday after Easter, I'm constrained to remind you.

Let me begin at once then to read from my favorite Bible translator, J. B. Phillips, his account of what happens as it's put down as part of the 24th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. Remember now, he's talking about what happened on Easter Sunday night . . .

"Then on the same day we find two of them going off to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they went they were deep in conversation about everything that had happened. While they were absorbed in their serious talk and discussion, Jesus himself approached and walked along with them, but something prevented them from recognizing him. Then he spoke to them,

'What is all this discussion that you are having on your walk?'

They stopped, their faces drawn with misery, and the one called Cleopas replied,

'You must be the only stranger in Jerusalem who hasn't heard all the things that have happened there recently!'

'What things?' asked Jesus.

'Oh, all about Jesus, from Nazareth. There was a man -- a prophet strong in what he did and what he said, in God's eyes as well as the people's. Haven't you heard how our chief priests and rulers handed him over for execution, and had him crucified? But we

were hoping he was the one who was to come and set Israel free . . .

'Yes, and as if that were not enough, it's getting on for three days since all this happened; and some of our womenfolk have disturbed us profoundly. For they went to the tomb at dawn, and then when they couldn't find his body they said that they had had a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of our people went straight off to the tomb and found things just as the women had described them -- but they didn't see him!'

Then he himself spoke to them,

'Aren't you failing to understand, and slow to believe in all that the prophets have said? Was it not inevitable that Christ should suffer like that and so find his glory?'

Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them everything in the scriptures that referred to himself.

They were by now approaching the village to which they were going. He gave the impression that he meant to go on further, but they stopped him with the words,

'Do stay with us. It is nearly evening and soon the day will be over.'

So he went indoors to stay with them. Then it happened! While he was sitting at table with them he took the loaf, gave thanks, broke it and passed it to them. Their eyes opened wide and they knew him! But he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other,

'Weren't our hearts glowing while he was with us on the road, and when he made the scriptures so plain to us?' . . . "

Well, that's the way it happened, that Easter night. Just as Jesus Christ became plain to people who came to the garden grave, so as two people were walking along the road, and talking, Jesus Christ became real to them.

Now let me share with you what I intended as the introduction to this sermon. A few years back a friend of ours invited some of us to dinner. I presume all told there were about eight or ten of us. The food was delightful, and the conversation was pleasant.....

...how I should tell you at once that our host and friend was something of a practical joker, but none of us was completely prepared for the kind of joke he pulled off on us that night. He'd had

a business trip to the big city and while he was there he purchased something that was just become vogue -- recording devices -- and unknown even to his wife he had secreted a microphone while we were having dinner at the table, and the entire conversation was recorded. When dinner was finished, the dessert had been served, we were astounded by what seemed to us like a chat-terbox -- and that was a good description, as he turned on the device and all of us sat there and heard our own voices...not only did we hear our voices but we heard what we had to say.

As I recall the incident, there were two pronounced reactions. One was this: the surprised reaction on the part of most people when they said, "Does my voice really sound like that!" You see, whatever we think our voices sound like, we never quite think they sound exactly as they do on a recording device. And it comes as somewhat of a shock sometimes to hear us, to hear our own voices.

But the second reaction in my book is far more significant: as people responded by saying, "Did I really say that!" Now mark you, the entire dinner conversation is being played back. The time has run its course. Never again will we have those minutes, or perhaps an hour, at our disposal...and having heard what we said, some of us are absolutely amazed at what we said -- it had, if you please, so little substance.

I look back over the years when I was privileged to serve as a member of the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church in America and I think of my old friend, now of blessed memory, Elson Ruff, who in his capacity as the Editor of the LUTHERAN attended all the meetings. Occasionally I'd look around the room and my eye would fall upon Dr. Ruff, and it occurred to me that he seemed to be about the most disinterested listener in the place, this man who was supposed to report on our deliberations. So one time when we were having

lunch together I took him to task, and then he amazed me and he said, "I may appear to be disinterested, and maybe it looks as though I've thrown myself in neutral, but I do become alive when something of substance is being said!

...what an indictment he placed against us who sat around that executive table -- to allow any man to throw himself in neutral because he believed that nothing of substance was being said, and who came alive only after the discussions had reached a particular point where perhaps something significant now might be said by someone.

But, my friend, I have a suggestion for you. Just as Elson Ruff had his own evaluating procedure, you formulate your own evaluating procedure sometime.

-- after you've hung up the telephone receiver and after you have been talking at length with someone, ask yourself the searching question: What now of significance did I say?

-- after you get out of your car when you have been in the carpool and you walk to your office, look back and think of all the things you were discussing and ask yourself the probing question: Did I contribute anything significant to that discussion?

God has given us the faculty of speech -- it's a very treasured thing. But By words we communicate our thoughts, and some of us can honestly admit that our lives have been changed because of certain critical periods in our lives, there are those who said certain things to us, significantly, that had substance. And having said those important things to us, our lives have been re-oriented, and we were motivated.

Occasionally I have my moments when I thank God for certain people who were raised up at a particular time in my life, who spoke to me certain words that haunt me, in the direction of goodness, and away from evil. They were that significant. They were that substantive.

All of this is simply to remind you, and to remind myself, that when our Blessed Lord became real to two people, as it's recorded in Holy Writ, it happened because they were engaged in serious discussion. It was not idle chatter. It did not lack substance. As J. B. Phillips properly puts it, they were given to serious discussion. I rise to ask the question: Why does so much of our conversation lack substance? Really now.

Let me attempt an answer. Maybe it's because we're swept on so quickly from one event to another. That's the characterization of modern life -- its pressure -- things happen so quickly. Maybe a cartoonist's apt characterization of contemporary man would be that of the switching eyeballs, like a spectator at a table tennis match.....we shift quickly from one thing to another. It takes time to think reflectively....it takes time to evaluate. And we just don't take the time.

Edwin Ray Thiel, in a book that he's written called "North With The Spring" tells of the small species of singing birds whose eyes out-weigh their brains. Says he, "It is a disproportion that frequently afflicts the human species as well." Many people have allowed their eyes to out-weigh their brains.....indiscriminately gorging their eyes from morning until night with unevaluated sights and spectacles, with no judgment rendered by the brain. Our minds are quickly filled with all that's cheap and with all that's tawdry.

On the other hand, in an interesting set of writings called "The Opinions of Oliver Asten" the author has said, "How delightful is the company of generous people who overlook trifles and keep their minds instinctively fixed on whatever is good and positive in the world about them. People of small caliber are always carping. Magnanimous people have no vanity, they have no jealousy, they feed on the true and the solid, wherever they find it."

Having said all of this, I suggest to you that maybe we're not given to substance in our conversation because we haven't time to think significantly.

Then secondly, I'm about to suggest to you, we don't always root and ground ourselves within a particular frame of reference, to wit:

....as Jesus Christ drew near and entered into their discussion, He kept introducing the eternal factor, He kept drawing upon Scripture. He kept talking about the God-factor.....

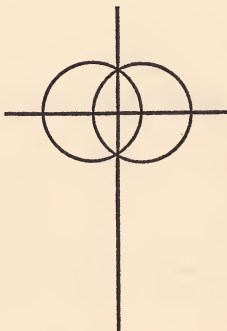
Maybe much of our conversation would have far more significance if we linked it up with the eternal dimension. I offer this to you for what it may be worth.

So we're numbered among those who wish that Jesus Christ could become real to us today. God has His own way, a variety of ways, if you please, by making Himself real, by revealing Himself. Don't overlook the fact that part of the Easter story is this: that there were two people who felt Jesus Christ very near at hand because they were engaged in serious conversationa conversation that had to deal with Him. Their dialogue-in-depth became a triologue-in-depth.....and it made all the difference in the world.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

*The Celebration
and
Blessing of a Marriage*



SAINT LUKE LUTHERAN CHURCH
Colesville Road at Dale and Highland Drives
Silver Spring, Maryland

THE CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE

THE PROCESSION *Let the people stand*

The people seated

Good people, we have come together in the presence of God to witness and proclaim the joining together of this man and this woman in marriage. The bond of marriage was established by God at creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself blessed this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all men.

The union of man and woman in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accord with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Into this holy union and
come now to be joined.

Then the Minister says to the persons to be married

I require and charge you both in the Name of God, that if either of you know any reason why you may not be united in marriage lawfully and in accordance with God's Word, you confess it now.

The Minister then says to the man

....., Will you have this woman to be your wife, to live together in a holy marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto her as long as you both shall live?

The man answers

I will by God's help.

The Minister then says to the woman

....., Will you have this man to be your husband, to live together in a holy marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto him as long as you both shall live?

The woman answers

I will by God's help.

The Minister addresses the following question to the wedding party and congregation:

Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support and uphold this marriage in the years ahead?

Answer

We will.

Here the Minister may ask

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

The one giving her in marriage says

I do.

The Minister then says to the People

The Lord be with you.

Answer

And also with you.

Minister

Let us pray.

THE COLLECT

The People standing

Eternal God, creator and sustainer of all men, giver of all grace, author of salvation: Look with favor upon this man and this woman, that they may grow in love and peace together; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

THE MARRIAGE

The man facing the woman, and taking her right hand in his, says

I,, take you,, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted in death. This is my sacred promise.

Then shall the woman, in like manner, say

I,, take you,, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my sacred promise.

The blessing of the rings:

Bless, O Lord, these rings that they who give and receive them may live in your peace, and continue in your favor, all the days of their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The giver places the ring on the ring-finger of the other's hand, and says,

I give you this ring as a symbol of my love, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the Name of God.

*Then the Minister joins the right hands of the husband
and wife and says*

Now that and have
given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining
of hands and the giving and receiving of rings, I pronounce that
they are husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, and of
the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Those whom God has joined together let no person separate.

The congregation responds AMEN.

Then may they kneel, and the Minister shall bless them, saying

The Lord God, who created our first parents and sanctified their
union in Marriage: Sanctify and bless you, that you may please
him both in body and soul, and live together in holy love until
life's end. *Amen.*

The Minister says Let us pray.

Almighty and most merciful God, who has now united this Man
and this Woman in the holy estate of Matrimony: Grant them
grace to live therein according to your holy Word; strengthen
them in constant fidelity and true affection toward each other;
sustain and defend them amid all trials and temptations; and
help them so to pass through this world in faith toward you, in
communion with your holy Church, and in loving service one
of the other, that they may enjoy forever your heavenly benedic-
tion; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.
Amen.

The Minister may add one or both of the following prayers

O Almighty God, Creator of mankind: Bestow upon these your servants, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children; and grant that they may see their children brought up in your faith and fear, to the honor and glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O God, our dwelling-place in all generations: Look with favor upon the homes of our land; enfold husbands and wives, parents and children, in the bonds of your pure love; and so bless our homes, that they may be a shelter for the defenseless, a bulwark for the tempted, a resting-place for the weary, and a foretaste of our eternal home in you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Then shall all say

OUR FATHER, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Then shall the Minister say the Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. *Amen.*

Or

God Almighty send you his light and truth to keep you all the days of your life. The hand of God protect you; his holy Angels accompany you. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, cause his grace to be mighty upon you. *Amen.*

PLEASE NOTE.....the taking of photographs is not permitted while the service is in progress nor at any time that the congregation is assembled.

-- ON MARRIAGE --

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

This second Sunday in May, as you already know, is increasingly being observed as The Festival of the Christian Home. As I stand at this sacred desk at this particular moment, I hear a question ringing in my ears, a question that I hear more frequently now than before: How does one hold a marriage together?

I suppose I don't bring you any news when I tell you that statistically they report that one out of every four marriages ends in divorces. And if one out of four ends in divorce, one should also ask himself the question: How many other marriages are there that are just being held together in the most fragile of ways, that do not eventually end in divorce, yet where the couples do little more than co-exist?

How does one hold a marriage together?

I presume the answer that you get will depend upon the person that you ask. And the answer that that person will give will be conditioned, perhaps, by his own personality and temperament, his own experience, and the length or brevity of his marriage.

-- now I tell you, if you were to ask my mother (of blessed memory) that question, How does one hold a marriage together? -- she would answer you just as frankly and honestly as she answered me: "Not very easily!"....and she had been married for 62 years. Yet even though she discovered that it was not an easy thing to keep that marriage together -- oh, don't get me wrong, it wasn't as bad as

all that! - - - but even though it wasn't an easy thing, still after 62 years she could still say they were together.....

It may all depend on to whom you put the question.

...now if you were to ask me, How does one hold a marriage together? I would say, it's no problem at all.....but if you were to ask Winifred.....!

You know that when a couple come to a pastor to be married, a Lutheran pastor specifically now, he is free to marry anyone on whom he feels the blessing of the Church can rest. So there are those of us, before we will schedule a wedding, of necessity have an interview, because we know the day and age in which we live, and we know, frankly, that it is not always easy to keep a marriage together.

Now if you were to come to me, as some of you have already done, you may remember that in the course of the interview there are four simple questions that are put to you, and each in turn of the couples gets his chance to answer....

...the first of the four questions is this: Why do you want to get married?for there are a number of people in our day who live together without the benefit of marriage....Why do you want to get married? and why do you want to be married before an altar?

...the second question -- and here I ask them to brace themselves a bit when I give them the same statistics that I've already given you, one out of every four marriages ends in divorce -- and the question is this: Why do you think your marriage will succeed? It is particularly significant when both of them in front of me have been married before, and each has been part of a failure --

because that's what divorce is -- it hasn't worked perfectly.

...the third question: How do you feel about children?....because in the eyes of the Church, in the eyes of God, if at all possible children were meant to be part of the picture.

...and the fourth question: What about your spiritual, your religious life? -- do you plan to attend church together?

Now I tell them, four simple questions as they are, yet as they answer they will very clearly give me some idea as to how they feel about each other. Their answers are able to reveal the regard that they have for the person who is going to become their mate. And also as they answer they give me some idea as to how they feel about marriage itself.

Now, how does one hold a marriage together?

For the most part, I suppose, we'd have to admit, practically all of us who are here, it's not always easy -- for the simple reason that a marriage is made up of two human beings. And human beings are not perfect. Human beings enter into other relationships beside marriage -- they enter into the relationship of a partnership, perhaps -- two, three, four people form a partnership -- but because they are human they always run the risk of failure, as a partnership. And when it happens there is hostility, there is bitterness, there is lack of trust. My heart is heavy when I tell you this, that there are even some congregations, quite unlike this one! -- but there are some congregations that can't be held together...they fall apart....they lack trust and respect for their fellow members....they don't make a go of it, even though they bear the title that they're part of the Family in God -- for the simple reason that the church, a partnership, or even marriage, is made up of human beings. And human beings are not perfect. That means that on occasion there will be some who won't make a go of it. It will fall apart. It will deteriorate.

Don't get me wrong -- I once went with a girl, a young woman I should say, to plead her cause in behalf of her divorce. She was married to a man that I classified as a beast. But only once in my thirty-two years in the ministry have I done that sort of thing. And even though the Church realistically admits that there is always the possibility of failure, the Church still clings tenaciously to the ideal that marriages were meant to last and that those who enter into that relationship ought to be given that understanding. This is the ideal.

And the world is better off because the ideal is always in front of us. We become according to the things toward which we strive. And that's why from the very beginning the Church, when it began to think in terms of a contract between two people, always introduced and kept there in a very significant way the ideal factors.

Now I want to do something that I don't know that I've ever done before. I want to have you look at the Marriage Service -- the booklet that you have in front of you now is a brand new one as far as this congregation is concerned. Your two Pastors have made a study of this and we now propose for use in Saint Luke Church this Order for "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage" -- that's the title that you find on the cover page. Now you'll see there the symbol that we have selected: there are the two rings, the two circles, for the ring has always been symbolic of a marriage and of the kind of love that the one person pledges to another. A circle has no beginning or ending. It goes on and on and on....

...these two circles are interlinked, and superimposed against the Cross, which is the symbol of God's love, God's sacrificial love. In the Scripture that we frequently use at a wedding service the bride and the groom are admonished to love one another "even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it."

Well now, turn the page, would you please. Once there is the procession and the people are seated, it begins in this manner:

Good people, we have come together in the presence of God to witness and proclaim the joining together of this man and this woman in marriage. The bond of marriage was established by God at creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself blessed this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all men.

The union of man and woman in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accord with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Now what have we said so far?

To begin with, we've set the wedding where it properly belongs -- in the midst of a people. Properly understood, marriage is no private affair. The Christian Church does not understand it that way, because we are part of all to whom we have had some kind of relationship, and when we are part of the Family of God, we bring this joy that claims us into their midst, and we appreciate the witness of a corporate group. It is no private matter.

You'll notice the beginning sentence of the second paragraph: "The union of men in heart, body, and mind -- " -- properly understood, as the Church looks upon marriage, it's meant to be a complete union -- no single aspect of your relationship to the person whom you marry ought to be withheld -- heart, body, and mind. And this, then, is intended by God for mutual joy; for the help and comfort....

....you remember your Latin -- comfort means "to be made strong"....and when you're linked to somebody in marriage you're meant to help him become a better person, to help him become a stronger person. When you're linked to someone in marriage, you recognize the fact

that there's not only the likelihood of prosperity, but also of adversity.....

Now it's not the business of the Church to tell people when to have children, how to have children, how many to have children...but it is the business of the Church to remind the couple who is being married that in the sight of God marriage, if at all possible, means family. Because when God had this in mind, God had in mind the furtherance of the human race, by people who would develop and grow according to the fear and knowledge of the Lord.

...this afternoon, beginning at three o'clock and continuing until nine tonight, as has been true for the past two Sundays and will be true for the next two Sundays, I have the good fortune to sit at Bethany, our Retreat House, and to talk to the boys and girls who are going to be confirmed on Pentecost. We meet -- usually I begin in this manner: the father and the mother, if at all possible, are both present, with the youngster and myself. I say, "There are four of us in this room right now. Why four of us?"....and then I look to the boy or the girl and I say, "Before you were born God looked around for two people in particular, and He chose them as the ones through whom you were to come into this world, and before you came into this world they were willing to love you and to give you everything that you would ever need - - - not everything that you might ever want, but everything that you would ever need. And somewhere along the line it occurred to them that the most wonderful thing that they could ever give to you was the knowledge of God's love...and when you were baptized they made certain promises to you. Now I am happy to tell you, after thirteen years they've kept their promise, and that's exactly why you're here. They've set before you an example of Christian love and truth."

Oh, I'm fully aware of the fact that the youngster right now, at thirteen

years of age isn't going to fully understand what I'm saying, but God grant that some day he might remember, even as I, on the day that I laid my own mother to rest, walked away from the grave, and caught myself up short, and somberly so, by the precious truth that I learned that here was the woman who first taught me to pray!

...now the Church writes this into the marriage ceremony, you see -- it's implicit there, that if at all possible there should be a child, or children, and that they may be brought up in the knowledge of God's truth and love.

Now, at the top of the page, the next page, the Minister turns to the man and addresses his words much as he addresses to the woman:

John, Will you have this woman to be your wife, to live together in a holy marriage?

..to live together in a holy marriage -- now you underline that word holy. I do not simply represent the State, as a minister, when I perform a marriage ceremony....I do not simply represent the State. I represent God. And the contract that these two people enter into is not simply a legal contract when the marriage ceremony is performed by a pastor. It's a thing that is sacred in the sight of God.....

Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto her as long as you both shall live?

You're keeping in mind, now, that the Church is always dealing in terms of the ideal. The Church does not say, "Will you live with this woman as long as she remains physically attractive to you?".....the Church does not say to this woman, "Will you live with this man as long as he maintains a certain salary level?"....the Church does not talk in these terms. And if you'll notice, the Church does not even talk in the terms of romance. Now don't get me wrong -- I hope to the day I die I'll always be able to look upon the

woman who claimed my heart and find a peculiar strange twinkling and a measure of excitement! There's a rightful and a proper place for romance in marriage, but in the eyes of the Church romance is not the big thing. In the eyes of the Church fidelity is. And so we don't say, "as long as you both will love"...

...I get quite impatient with people who when they want to write their own marriage ceremony want to write into the vows "as long as we both shall love" -- because I'm not so sure that they understand what that word love really means. But the Church says, for your good, "As long as you both shall live" -- it's a life-long commitment.

Now the Church is also very realistic, and we've introduced a new element here. Up to this time, every couple that I've married, the answer to be given at this point is, "I do" or "I will." But we've learned a lesson or two after three decades, some of us, so we respond realistically at this point. And the answer is, "I will by God's help." Marriage is entered into by human beings -- even though they may be nobly intentioned, they are still not perfect people. God never made any man big enough to pull off the things that ought to be done in His sight with decency and honor all by himself. We need all the help in the world we can get. And above all else we need God's help. When a couple come to me for counseling, when their marriage is being deteriorated.....

...and by the way, I think you ought to know this, that if from the time your Senior Pastor gets up in the morning until he goes to bed at night he could do a day's work for his Lord by doing nothing else except ministering to people within this parish and outside this parish whose marriages

are falling apart!...and sometimes when he sits and talks with some of these people he has two things in mind.....

...if only each of the individuals could do some soul-searching and ask himself the question: How much a part of the problem am I? -- and then secondly, with equal strength, ask himself the question: How much a part of the answer to this problem am I willing to become? And I think what distresses me most is when I introduce the God-factor, for I am in duty bound to do this, and ask them to see this thing from God's point of view, and implore God's help --- sometimes it's at this point that they begin to chicken out. And that's always a sad thing, when we're reluctant to get the help of God to make a thing work....."I will by God's help." -- that's the better answer.

Now to the top of the next page, something new that's also been added. The Minister addresses the following question to the wedding part and congregation:

Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support and uphold this marriage in the years ahead?

Now you're recognizing this, aren't you, that whenever Christians come together and they're exposed to something that's happening in the lives of two of their members, they become involved. After this service this morning your Pastors will stand here and baptize two babies. Well now, properly understood, when those children are being baptized we are all involved, because they're being baptized into the Family of God. And all of us are in duty bound to give them some kind of Christian instruction and training and good example as they grow and develop. And by the same token when two people come to be married all of us who are around them, as fellow members in the Family of God, are in duty bound to help them, and to support them.

Down at the bottom of the page -- we'll move along quickly -- the prayer:

Eternal God, creator and sustainer of all men,

giver of all grace, author of salvation:
Look with favor upon this man and this
woman, that they may grow in love and
peace together;

And what does that mean?

That means that marriage is still nothing but a beginning. Marriage is something that looks forward to something far better in the years yet to come, that they may grow in love. Love is always meant to be a growing thing, an enriching thing, a maturing thing. And any of you who happen to have farmer's blood coursing in your veins, you know very well that you could never expect something to mature unless you kept after this business of cultivating...cultivating.....

....I give this to you quite parenthetically, yet as human a thing as I can: We took the boys and girls in the Confirmation Class to their annual trip to Gettysburg to visit the college and seminary yesterday. We had lunch in a delightful setting, we had a special room all to ourselves. To expedite matters some of us helped the waitress -- she had to come from the upper floor, pass through the room where she had her locker and where she put on a uniform, and then from that room she brought the food to the table -- so some of us were helping her. And as I stood there getting the tray from her hand my eye fell on a chart that evidently the manager had put up there for each waitress:

- Are my stockings runless?
- Is my uniform clean, spotless?
- Is my bonnet fastened on neatly?
- Is my make-up on (whatever the word should have been
that he saw fit to use) ?
before I go out to meet the customers?

I thought to myself, if this gal is being charged with so great responsibility to keep herself neat and attractive before she served a man that she might never

see again, or any customer that she might never see again -- if it was that important --- how much more important it is for a person to keep cultivating himself in the eyes of the one to whom he is married!

At the top of the next page:

I, John, take you, Mary, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my sacred promise.

Now let me say it and say it again. In the eyes of the Church the big thing in the marriage relationship is not basically romance. In the eyes of the Church the big thing in the marriage relationship is fidelity, loyalty.

Now down at the bottom of the page, when it comes to the exchange of rings-- I think this is put beautifully:

I give you this ring as a symbol of my love, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the Name of God.

...and you'll notice where that puts it in its proper relationship, introduces the right dimension: in the Name of God.

Well, I could go on and finish this with you. Time is running out. So the Church, in the Order for Marriage, The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, holds before its people the ideal. For those who have been blissfully married there is nothing, absolutely nothing in the world that can match it. For those who have been married, and their marriage has fallen apart, there isn't anything that I know of that can be so harmful to human personality and others who are related to that marriage, as the hostilities that set in, and the bitterness and the lack of trust.

Now what does the Church say? Hear me and hear me well. The Church says "by God's help" --- do everything you can to make it work --- it's wonderful. But if by any chance you can't make it work, the Church still stands by, and by the grace of God will minister to you in whatever way it can.

*v * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"LOST NOTE IN OUR THOUGHT OF GOD"

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from
God our Father and from His
Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

It should not come as news to you that your Senior Pastor together with other members of the staff, and an increasing number of people in this congregation, sets aside a certain portion of each day for personal, prayerful devotion. No matter how feverish the pace, nor hectic, the schedule, there must always be some time of quiet. Now as part of that schedule there's the daily Bible reading.

Last September I said to myself, how about reading the Bible again, cover to cover? So I began last September, and just last week I finished it...the closing chapter of the Book of the Revelation was read.

Now that the Bible has been read from cover to cover, page by page and book by book, I've asked myself very realistically -- so what? What impression remains now that the Bible has been read from cover to cover?

Well first off, this very significant impression is there, that the Bible, whatever it is, is not primarily a book about man. It's above all else a book about God....

...secondly, because it is a book about God it must be seen as a religious text, if you please. It is not a book about science. It is not a history book. It is not a book of literature, as such. It is a religious text. From it things are always being seen from the divine prospect, where the God-factor is always being related to us and to our world.....

The third thing that remains, once the Bible has been read from cover to cover, is this: that it's the Bible that tells us about the nature and the character of God. Men have always wondered what God is like. We Christians have this advantage, for as Martin Luther said so properly, "It's the Bible that leads us to Jesus Christ." And if you want to know what God is like, you turn to the Bible, and as you become increasingly acquainted with His nature and character you discover His plan for mankind, His plan for salvation. And that introduces you to the most wonderful thing that can be said about the Bible: from cover to cover, it's primary purpose is to lead us to Jesus Christ.

Now the last thing, if you don't mind, by way of just some cursory reaction to having read the Bible from cover to cover again -- the last thing is this: that I'm impressed all over again that the Bible seeks to establish clearly in our minds that God is always doing something -- He's-always up to something.

Now hopefully that ought to impress you, particularly if you think of the many people in the world who believe in God but do not believe in God as Christians believe in God. You know, of all the people who believe in God, we Christians constitute a minority, when you talk about the Christian understanding of God. Now there are many people who pride themselves in being religious but when they think about God, they think about Him as one being far removed, separated from His world. And because of this great distance by which He's separated, if you please, He has a detached interest, He's not overly concerned -- -- He's high, He's lifted up, we may treat this distance with respect and awe, but nonetheless for those of this school, God is removed, and is distant, and seldom shows any kind of interest in us.

There are some people who when they think of God, think about Him as

one who is impassive and insensitive, but nonetheless He exists and is greater than we.

On the other hand, there are those who when they think of God they think of Him as one who does interfere, He does act, He will be up to something...but unfortunately when He does act, it's usually in a negative way.

...do you know, and it still may be true today, that in years gone by, when a ship was wrecked at sea because of a natural storm, the owners of that ship wanted to protect themselves against such an incident, and so they had to deal with a clause that was written into an insurance contract, and that clause read something like this: An Act of God. It explains, you see, something that happened over which man had no control. Property was destroyed....lives were lost. But man himself had no control over that. But somebody had to be blamed, somebody had to be held responsible. So unfortunately it was referred to as an "Act of God" -- as though when God was up to something, it would have to be associated with the tragic and the miserable.

I have come to this sacred desk to remind you this morning that that's a very narrow and a very limited view of God. As the Bible teaches us anything about God it teaches us this: that God is always up to something, and He's always up to something that's good -- that His productive enterprises are always beneficent.

Now there's a text that I want to read for you. It's the 16th verse of the 18th Psalm. The reference is by David to God:

"He reached from above, he took me in,
He drew me out of many waters . . ."

Now what is that text saying to us? That text is telling us that God has a hand that's outstretched, and it's long enough to reach to us where we are in our dire strait....it's a supportive hand....it's a strong hand....it's a

redemptive hand....it brings us up, and heals, and restores, and protects. This, I suggest to you, is frequently a lost note in contemporary man's thought of God. For shame upon many of us that we've forgotten that God is still in business, that God is still up to something, and He gives Himself to productive enterprises that are always beneficent.

I wish you could fill me in at this point, I don't know who it is any longer -- I did once know -- about the very wonderful father of the very grand and glorious poem.....and one day the entire household was startled by the ringing of a bell. It sounded like a fire-bell. And when the entire family ran out on the front porch, they were greeted by their father, who had done the ringing of the bell, and he said, "Look! -- See! -- " And what were they to look at? Nothing but a perfectly beautiful and wonderful sunset! -- and then to get some significant commentary from their father -- "That's the hand of God," said he, "The creator-God is a good God, and you might have missed this! You might have been insensitive to the fact that God was painting His sky with all this grandeur and beauty."

Maybe some of us need to be shaken, maybe somebody needs to sound the alarm, that we might recognize the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is still at work, and doing some grand and wonderful things.

I think you should know that this year, as last year, we departed from tradition in Saint Luke Church. Up to last year the Senior Pastor would sit down quietly and earnestly and with the help of someone assign Confirmation verses to each youngster in the catechetical class. If at all possible he'd try to suit a particular verse to the temperament and the personality of the youngster. It was done rather arbitrarily. I don't know that there's too much to be said for that procedure.

So last year and this year we correlated the class together. Not too long ago the class that's going to be confirmed on Sunday, June 10, was brought

here into the Nave -- we had no classroom space for them elsewhere. So each youngster was asked to take a pew all by himself. He was encouraged to stretch out and to relax casually as he saw fit. And then he was given a book of Psalms -- all 150 of them -- and then a significant portion of the class period was given to this exercise, if you please. The youngster was gold to take his time and to read those Psalms -- as many as he might wish to cover -- and to look for that verse of Scripture that could be meaningful for him.

Now prior to this some word was spoken about the value of the Confirmation verse, how we wanted the youngster to look upon this verse as a special verse.....

....how we wanted the youngster always to associate this verse with that precious moment in his life when he was confirmed in the Christian faith...

...how perhaps every time when he comes to receive the Sacrament of the Altar, he might, as he waits there at the altar, recite that Confirmation verse to himself....

...and if sometime he should have a very critical moment in his life, when he would cry out in anguish to God for help, it might be this verse of Scripture that would hold him in good stead.....

Now why do I tell you all of this?

As part of the interview sessions at Bethany these Sundays, I invariably ask the youngster to recite his Confirmation verse and to tell me why he happened to choose it as he did. And quite frequently I discover that the verse that he has chosen is a verse that indicates that God has a concern for him, and that God will work for good in his behalf. And, my friend, I tell you with all the ardor of my soul, I'm not about to discourage

that line of thinking, for we are dependent creatures, and this is part of our weakness: we fail to recognize the fact that we are dependent creatures in the sight of God, and that none of us was ever meant to make it by himself. And that God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ stands ready to help, to guide, sustain and protect. What do we teach them in a very elementary way about a parent, a father or a mother? -- the purpose that in God's plan for their lives that they serve? -- to stand ready, to help, to counsel, to rescue.

I once traveled some distance with an acquaintance of mine. We were talking about our relationship to teenagers, and he said he thanked God for the wisdom by which he was able to say to both of his children, a son and a daughter, "There is one thing I want you clearly to understand: no matter where you may go, and no matter in what kind of trouble you may ever get, you're to reach out for me -- you're to let me know. I want to assure you that I'll show up and try to do my best to help you. I may have like sin the mess in which you've gotten yourself, but I want you to know I always stand ready to help."

If I understand the Bible aright, that's the kind of God we have in the one who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's always there, ready to give Himself, through His energies, into something that will work for our good, corrective and redemptive as it may be.

Now you haven't found this to be true, you tell me? -- you haven't discovered this lost note in our thought about God? -- that He's always up to something, and that He's always about to be doing something good? -- you haven't found that to be true? Well if you haven't, and if this should be your situation, may I suggest two reasons:

One, because you're trying too hard to make it by yourself, and you're absolutely egocentric. You think you can lift yourself

by your own bootstraps, and you're not about to cry out to God for help.....

If that is your situation, then you don't know anything at all about a God whose hand is long enough and strong enough to be of help.

And the second reason: If you don't know anything at all about this hand that's big enough and long enough to touch you were you are, in your dire straits, it may be that you're hugging the shore too much -- you've never known what it is to risk and to dare, to find yourself in difficulty because of a grand reason.

When Winifred and I went to Africa in mid-winter, we discovered there, as we found to be true with missionaries in other parts of the world, true children of faith, who believe in the providence of God, as many of us do not.

...why? Because they're constantly living on the frontier -- they're always in some kind of an emergency situation....they've always found out that their God is able to come through.....

The great ones for God were always in dire straits -- their days were simply one emergency situation after another. That's what made them the great ones. They hugged no safe shore, but daringly faced the storm and the tension in the sure knowledge that God's hand would reach out to them and raise them up once their own strength was spent. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

May 27, 1973

"AS THE FACE OF GOD"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Gen. 33:10

First the text. Going all the way back to that first book in the Bible, and now it's the 10th verse of the 33rd chapter of Genesis:

*"I have seen thy face as though
I had seen the face of God . . ."*

Behind this text is the story of two brothers. And if it's been said once, as people talk of two members in the same family, it's been said a million times and more: "They're as different as night is from day." The one was a rascal, a very clever rascal, and that's the worst kind of rascal. For he defrauded his brother, who wasn't very quick on the trigger....

...the years passed by somehow or another, according to God's plan, of course, the man who had done the defrauding had his conscience pricked, and so Jacob, now, thinks it's about time that he makes amends. He packs up his family and his belongings, and he heads for home. And as he's heading for home he begins to say to himself, "I wonder how this thing is going to come off."

It takes a great deal of courage, you see, to admit that you have been wrong. It takes a great deal of courage to look somebody straight in the eye and to say that you've misjudged him, that you spoke unkindly. Well the years may have given this kind of courage to Jacob. So he's heading home.

And on his way home he has a dream, and that dream comes into a reality. For before he even gets home, his brother Esau, whom he had defrauded, comes out to meet him -- something in the spirit of the story that Jesus Christ told

about the Prodigal Son -- the man who had been wronged embraces the man who had defrauded him, gives him the kiss of forgiveness -- even before it's asked for.

...and then when that happens, Jacob, the rascal who has had a change of heart, says to his brother, "I have seen your fact as though it was the face of God."

...No finer thing does any man ever say to another man -- to look at him and say, "When I look at you it seems to me as though I'm looking into the face of God."

Now I'll grant you, it's a very dangerous thing to become to anthropomological, and to put God in human form. Yet, human as we are, we can only think in human terms. Now all of this leads me to tell you that I want to talk to you a little while this morning about the way God becomes real to us through people.

God becomes real to us in many ways. God can become real to us through the world of nature. God can become real to us in some unsettling moment of life, in some tragedy, in some crisis, in just the experience itself. But God's preferred method of becoming real to us is always through people, so much so that when God wanted to make His complete revelation He came, as you well know, in the form of a human being.....

....He came in the form of a carpenter's son

....He came in the form of one who at one time was a teenager, whose parents couldn't quite understand Him...

....He came in the form of one who was a draftsman....

....He came in the form of one who knew what it was to walk around ankle-deep in the shavings of a carpenter's shop.....

....He came in the form of one who knew what it was to climb the hill above Nazareth and lie flat on his belly, and with a straw in His hands, put it to His lips and think deep thoughts as He looked out into the distance and saw the traffic, the commercial route.....

....He came in the form of a human being who stood around while other people were talking, and He listened to what they had to say....

....He came in the form of a human being who trudged down the street of Nazareth with yoke of oxen on His shoulders, about to deliver it to a man who ordered it, and then He waited while the man paid for it.....He remembered also about how His father Joseph had spoken about people who took advantage of other people -- how other carpenters sometimes would charge a price far in excess of what the product was worth, and take advantage of them and exploit them....

Jesus Christ came in the form of a human being, olive-skinned, dark-eyed boy, who one day a writer in the Good Book could say of Him: "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." And this same human being, of whom we reverently say "Very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father" -- -- this very same God-in-human-form, when His work was completed, turned to a bunch of human beings and said to them:

"And you shall be my witnesses -- you
shall be the people to reveal to other
people my truth and my goodness and my love."

It's a language, my friend, that we need to understand -- that God sees fit to speak to us through people.

For myself, I frankly admit that on more than one occasion when I

think of God, I think of certain people in particular. So much so that a few Christmases ago, when I wanted to write in my own hand a personal Christmas message to some people who have been for me the personification of the very spirit of God, I sat down earnestly and said, now how can I express it? -- how can I put it into words? And this is the way I for one resolved it -- I simply wrote, "Knowing someone like you makes it very easy for me to believe that God did come." There are people like that.

The older I've become the more I wish I could begin my ministry all over again, and particularly to save myself from some of the mistakes I made in my beginning years. I remember how I took a parishioner to task -- in my own mind, never to him directly -- because he told me that when he thought of God he thought in terms of my predecessor. Being young in the ministry, I took him to task, as though any human being had a right to have his name mentioned so reverently, and almost in the same breath as you mention the name of God.

But now that I've become a bit older and realize how God has become real to me through people, I go back ever so often and apologize to this man for having short-changed him in my own thought. For my predecessor was a man whose heart was as big as the world, who loved people into the Kingdom, who whenever he might have been maligned, simply went on loving -- who when he was criticized for the way he did a day's work for his Lord, he simply went about working harder. Small wonder, then, that this man who had been baptized, confirmed in the Christian faith by that holy man of God, couldn't help but think about God and name this good pastor in the same sentence.

It's a awesome thing, my friend, to realize that this is true. I dare you to think of God without thinking of certain people who have as instruments in the hand of God by which He has become real to you. God's preferred method is always to work through people. I'm suggesting to you

that you and I begin to realize this fact and learn to understand this language.

The second thing that I'm suggesting is this: that you and I learn to speak this language....that you and I recognize the fact that God does use us as channels of His grace and of His truth. I submit to you that you can't possibly appreciate truth in the abstract. You appreciate truth because you know people who are truthful. I'm not so sure that you can appreciate goodness in the abstract -- you recognize the validity of all that's good because you have met people who are good...

...and the awesome truth remains: that there are some of us who believe in the fact of God because we have encountered people who have been God-like.

God never placed upon any man a finer crown than when He gave him the capability to reflect His goodness. The Biblical language classically put is this: that God saw fit to make us in His likeness, in His image.

Now quickly I have to say to you: the sad fact of life is this, that there are some people who hinder other people in their belief of God, because they are so ungod-like -- just as there are other people who make it easier for people to believe in the fact of God. You and I had better become a bit more skilled in speaking the language of God which is the language of human personality.

Would you allow me to tell you this -- it's biographical, of course -- any preacher who finds himself going to the sacred desk again and ever so often draws from the experience of his own day. Just yesterday morning a six-year old came to me with a picture of the Devil. He was intrigued. I thought he'd be frightened -- he was fascinated -- pitchfork -- the old pic-

ture of the Devil, you know -- red suit....horns....a tail...the fiery nostrils. And then all of a sudden it occurred to me that at that precise moment in time and place I was meant to be God's spokesman to him regarding evil. And at that precise moment in time and place God was going to use me, as a frail and feeble instrument, to communicate His truth. It happens again and again, my friend, when you find yourself in that awesome situation.

The most wonderful thing that God wants to communicate is not simply to speak to us against evil, but the most wonderful thing that He wants to communicate is His forgiving love. And that's about the last thing that some of us want to give. And yet this man Jacob could never have said what he said is he had not found in the face of Esau the face of forgiveness.

I wrote this down to quote for you this morning. It's from "My Lady of The Chimney Corner" - - -

"God takes a hand wherever He can find it, and just does with it what He likes. Sometimes He takes a Bishop's and lays it on a child's head in benediction; and then He takes the hand of a doctor, to relieve pain, the hand of a mother to guide her child. And sometimes He takes the hand of an old creature like me to give a bit of comfort to his neighbor. But they're all hands touched by His spirit, and His Spirit is everywhere looking for hands to use . . . "

And how is God made real to people? There's more than one way, of course. None is better, however, than His own preferred method. God is made real to people through people. Granted we say that in the Bible God speaks to us, but how? - - - on page after page it is through men that He speaks... ..what they said....what they did....what they became....

....anybody getting God's message through you lately?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

MAPPING A PERSONAL PROGRAM

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

1 Once when I was preaching in Hong Kong I found myself standing in what looked like a double pulpit, that is, there was deliberate room made for two preachers to stand in that pulpit -- one who would be preaching in Cantonese and the other who would be preaching in Mandarin, so that the one sermon was given to the congregation in whichever language they preferred it. I feel somewhat this morning as though I am standing in a pulpit where somebody is nudging, trying to get in. And I dare say that that person who is edging this way, as I think of him, could be the Assistant Pastor of this parish. Because I honestly believe he'd like very much to be standing at this particular time, because he's worked with you in a very definite way these four-and-a-half years here at Saint Luke. You're the one group that he's seen all the way through the Senior High activities since he's been here. I know how much he loves you, I know how much he's prayed for you, I know how much he's endeavored to encourage you to be all that Jesus Christ wants someone like you to be. And I would be less than honest if I did not in this moment salute him, as the Senior Pastor of this parish, for what I know he has channeled into your lives.

And if I can say this about his trying to edge his way into this pulpit this morning, no less disrespectful on my part, heaven forbid, I feel as though there is somebody standing looking down over my right shoulder.....for if I can say of a human being, an assistant pastor in a congregation, that he'd be nudging

his way into this pulpit, how much more, then, can I feel the pressure of God's Son, Jesus Christ, the wandering preacher of Galilee, who was once himself a teenager such as you, who knew what it was to grow up, and to know the pang and the thrill, the pain and the pleasure of the awesome aspect of emerging into adulthood.

So as I stand here I am not unmindful of the fact that Jesus Christ is breathing heavily over my shoulder. And I can well imagine how I can hear Him say, "They belong to me -- I've loved them -- I've claimed them -- I've had a moment in their lives when they knelt, when they stood up and then they knelt within the shadow of an altar and made promises to me. And when they made promises to me in their time of Confirmation, I made promises to them, and I will not break my promise to them as long as they live . . . "I hear Jesus Christ saying those things as He breathes down my back, if you please, as I stand here seemingly alone in this pulpit at this significant moment in your lives.

If you don't mind, I am constrained today to go back and to talk about a favorite passage of mine in the New Testament. It's a thrilling chapter in the life of our Blessed Lord. It has to deal with the time when He made plain, in a very real way, that He knew exactly what life was all about, and He intended to do something about it. You can read it for yourself in the 4th chapter in the Gospel according to Luke....

....He'd been away from His home town for quite a while, His reputation had been spread about that He was making quite a name for Himself. He was no longer the carpenter's apprentice, He was a preacher now. And no matter where He went I think there were people who put their finger to their lips and reverently

whispered the name of God, because they said, "We never heard anybody talk about God the way He did!"and I suppose if He were to come to us today as He came to them then, in your jargon, some of you who would have seen Him for the first time would have said, "Man, he's really cool! He turns us on for God! He makes God so real to us -- he makes us feel so important to Him!"

....He had that kind of charisma -- He had that kind of spiritual integrity. In His every relationship with people the God-factor came through, loud and clear. You would have liked Him very much then, and there. And I dare say He would have liked you very much, had you lived then and there.

Well, as He went around from place to place, one day He happened to come back to the town where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went to the place where He was accustomed to worship...and I can well imagine, bear with me now, how the presiding elder happened to spy the carpenter's-son-turned-preacher as He entered the synagogue. And I suppose He acted immediately on impulse and went over to Joseph's son, Jesus, the carpenter-turned-preacher, and said to Him, "We've heard wonderful things about you -- and we might have known that when you came back to Nazareth you'd be here where you always were before....but, Jesus, would you do something for us this morning . . ." (or tonight, as the case may have been) -- "When the time comes to read one of the sets of lessons, why don't you do it?"

....well, that's exactly what happened.

And there was a great deal of excitement when the time came for the lessons to be read because after He read the lessons, then He sat down. And according to their custom, that was indicative of the fact that He

was going to say something. And then this is exactly what He said -- after He had read what He had read, He said, "This day is Scripture being fulfilled in your ears" -- as much as to say, "What I have read from the Bible is going to come alive! -- and it's going to come alive through me!"

That was a rather startling thing to say. But let's back up for a minute and let me read for you what He said then and there, as He read from the sacred writings:

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

What He really was doing was this: mapping out for Himself a personal program, announcing to them just what it was that was going to claim all of His energy. He knew who He was, and He knew that He was meant to serve.

In my wallet that I carry around with me, as I may have told some of you, I carry in the handwriting of one of the three people in this world

I love most a quotation that he got from a book. It reads something like this: "There are two significant days in the life of every individual. One is the day when he was born - - "

...you can understand that, because on the face of this earth there isn't anyone else just like you! The first significant date is the day when you're born.....

" - - and the second significant date is when you discover for yourself why you were born - - - "

Somewhere, somehow it had become plain to Jesus Christ, increasingly so, that He was born for a purpose. And it was in Nazareth that He unfolded His personal program.

Now I must say to you very quickly that when He did that He was indicating something that you may not have thought of. While He was doing this thing, grand and wonderful as it was, He was revealing to us that He had had a hero, that someone in particular had inspired Him.

I am numbered among those who honestly believe that everyone ought to have a hero, or heroes. I hesitate to tell this to you, but you know, you have come in for your share of criticism, just like my generation has come in for its share of criticism -- who hasn't been criticized? But you may or may not become familiar with this aspect of criticism: there are people who criticize your generation, because they say you have no heroes, you have no one who inspires you.

There was a time, forty or fifty years ago, when it was quite common for people to have heroes -- idols -- folks who inspired them. I can remember as a lad growing up in that small town in Pennsylvania, going to that post office -- (we had to go to the post office to get our mail) --

and the clerk on the other side of the window I am sure got tired of seeing me because I'd written off to Hollywood and I'd asked my favorite actor to send me his photograph. And I knew that some day it would come, and I'd post it in my room. He had fear of clay, of course he did, but for me in that moment in my life he was a hero.

...and then of course my hero shifted from one person to another, but always somewhere there was a hero who had in one way or another an influence upon my life.

Jesus Christ, if you please, had His hero too, in this case, as He quoted from Scripture, it was Isaiah. I encourage you to have your heroes -- I encourage you to draw them from Holy Writ -- I would encourage you to read the Bible and to find the great souls, the stalwart ones....

...Gideon.....Joseph.....Moses.....Isaac....

...Jeremiah...Peter...Paul...John...David...Timothy....

...I encourage you to find one who can be your hero....

-- and above all else, Jesus Christ.

Well, that's exactly what happened in the life of Jesus Christ -- He had a hero, Isaiah, who when He read his writings, inspired Him.

But it's never enough to be inspired. One must act upon his inspiration. And this is the day when Jesus Christ gave notice that He was going to act. Inspired by what Isaiah wrote, He said, "Now today this is going to be fulfilled in your midst -- -- -- no, I am going to do something about it!"

And the next observation that I have to make is this: as I indicated to you earlier, it was a personal program that He laid out for Himself. He didn't wait around for a committee to meet -- He didn't wait for some group to be organized, no matter how necessary these things may be. But He began by doing something about it Himself. He didn't wait to see how many other people would join Him. He only knew there was a job to be done.

Now sometime today I am reasonably certain that at least three or four of you -- yes, I would think maybe three or four out of all of you -- will read this 4th chapter of Luke before you go to bed tonight. And when you do you'll discover that what Jesus Christ is talking about is what the world needs....and what Jesus Christ talked about as the world's need in that day is still the world's need. You can find it for yourself as it's drafted there, every single aspect of need in society is mentioned by the program that Jesus Christ had worked out for Himself, and He said He was going to try, as one person, to help meet the need.

Now the last thing that I have to tell you is this: that He says something about that personal program of His, and the joy of gladness. It was something that gave Him a terrific kick -- it gave Him a great thrill -- it gave Him an abiding measure of satisfaction. He found true happiness in the program that He had planned for Himself.

Now in connection with this concluding remark, I'm wondering just what it is that you would map out for your personal program, your earnest desire at this point in life. What is it that you want most to do? -- to live a long time?

...some people have that as an earnest desire, and your chances are better than any preceding generation to have length added to your years. In our day and age the easiest dimension of life to fulfill is length. ...98,000 out of every 100,000 persons will reach 50 years of age in our society. Over 70,000 out of every 100,000 will attain the age of 70. About 17,000 out of every 100,000 will reach 80 years or more. And I think I'm correct in telling you that right now in the United States there are 10,000 people who are over

100 years of age! The easiest dimension in your life to fulfill is length.

But Jesus Christ does not talk about living a long time. In fact He didn't. And I am somewhat chagrined when I realize that God has given me longer years than He gave His own Blessed Son. I know what He did with His 33 years, and I shudder in the sight of God, before whom I must stand in Judgment, that He's given me length of years before what His Son enjoyed. Jesus Christ did not ask simply to live a long time.

And surely you know very well that Jesus Christ did not ask that He might make a lot of money. I'm not going to draw from Scripture for this moment, as I deal with this concluding remark that He made a while ago. But I do draw from the "Man in The Gray Flannel Suit" --- that was quite a book, written some time ago, which brought down a curse upon those who take money as their goal....

...the grandson had this to say about his grandmother, and let me read it for you in plain, unvarnished language as the writer put it: "She's dying. She lived 93 years. For her it was all a free ride. She never cooked a meal, or made a bed, or washed a diaper, or did a damned thing for herself --- or anybody else. Now she's dying. And she's scared!" --- the woman who had three million dollars...but she never did a thing for anybody else.

Albert Schweitzer spoke to a graduating class in an English boys' school back in 1935. This final remark, as related to the concluding observation of how he *saw* fit to invest his life -- said Albert Schweitzer, "I do not know what your destiny will be. Some of you will perhaps occupy remarkable positions. Perhaps some of you will become famous. But I know

one thing -- the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found a way to serve your fellow man."

...Said Jesus Christ: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me --"
...and then He went out and did His best, and gave His life, to help...
...to help.....

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HAPPINESS IS - - -"

GRACE, Mercy and peace
from God our Father and from
His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

Psalm 119

To you, members of this year's Confirmation Class in Saint Luke Church,
the topic of the brief meditation is "Happiness is - - ". And the text, the
first two verses of Psalm 119:

*"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who
walk in the law of the Lord.
Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,
that seek him with a whole heart."*

Happiness is many things.

-- It's a woman in Denver, Colorado, who has been waiting earnestly for
the June 10 issue of Saint Luke MESSENGER, because she
knows on the front page of the June 10 issue of Saint Luke
MESSENGER the names of the Saint Luke Confirmation Class
will be listed, and opposite each name will be listed a
Confirmation verse. Happiness is that woman who is reading
your names, reading your Confirmation verses, and then of-
fering a prayer for you . . .

-- Happiness is that woman, a member of this congregation, who when you
came to Bethany for your personal interview, sat in the quiet
of her own apartment, after having received in advance the
listing of those who would be coming on a particular Sunday,
and as you and I sat there together she was praying for the

two of us -- praying that God might put into my heart the right things to say to you, and praying that God might make you sensitive, that you might not miss what was meant for you at that time. . .

- - - Happiness is - - Connie Oxford coming down the aisle today, with a smile on her face which radiated joy . . .

- - - Happiness is the Parish Deaconess, seated in the main room at Bethany, when I would ask the youngster to recite to me Luther's Explanation of the Second Article of the Creed, and she permitted herself to believe that her class would be able to do that better than any of the other five sectionshappiness is the Parish Deaconess, smiling, as each one of her youngsters recited the Explanation of the Second Article of the Creed . . .

- - - Happiness is Susan Rowles, whose mother became a member of this parish on the very day in which she is going to be confirmed

- - - Happiness is Terry Ryan, who on the very day in which she's being confirmed, her grandmother became a member of this congregation . .

- - - Happiness is . . . many things.

But the Good Book says Happiness is that person who walks in the way of the Lord, in an undefiled manner . . . happy is that person who remembers the Lord's testimonies with a whole heart. All of us want to be happy.

And when are we happiest? The Paulist says we are happiest when we are remembering God, when we are doing the things that please Him, when we are walking in His way. But do I have to tell you, my young friends, that none of

can walk in His way perfectly. We're going to stumble, and we're going to fail. And maybe some of you were surprised when, in that personal interview with you I told you how I look back to that church in that small town in Pennsylvania when I was confirmed, at the age of twelve, and how the way was pointed out for me by a Godly man, and how I tried to walk in that path...

...and then I look back every now and then and remember how I stumbled and how I fell -- the things I wanted to do that I never quite got done for my Lord and for my Master.....

But happiness lies in the fact that the God who knows us and who calls us to walk in His way is also the God who understands when we fail, and He's standing right by us, helping us to get up and to start all over again, and He faces us in the right direction.

I had Sunday dinner today with a couple of youngsters. One of them was quite unhappy for a moment, and then he left the table and went into another room. I thought I could hear him sobbing....but the stern advice was given the doting grandfather, "Let him be - - let him be!" And the advice was wise. And hard as it was for me to keep my distance from him, I did my best. But then there was a moment when it seemed wise to me that someone should go to him.....and I had only to go to him and just touch him on the shoulder, and say, "Won't you please come back and we'll begin all over again - - ". Happiness was the smile on the face of a youngster who was given to understand that he still belonged to a family circle, even though for the moment he had left it himself.

Happiness is being restored.....and being loved.

Happiness is you - - making your vow today -- happiness is you telling the Lord Jesus Christ that you will love and serve Him. Happiness is you making a promise and knowing full well that that

promise may be hard to keep, but also being assured that God is the one who helps us to keep the promises that are made in His name . . .

- - Happiness is you coming next Lord's Day to receive the Sacrament, because in the Sacrament God comes to us . . .

- - Happiness is the angels in Heaven, knowing that today and in this place there are those of you who are responding to God's love . . .

- - Happiness is the one, if you please, who in Heaven above is the Recording Angel, and is marking down another chapter in your life. For if you'd been baptized, then the angel is recording the fact that your parents kept that promise, and there is great joy in the Heavens when parents keep promises in behalf of their children. There's great joy in Heaven, there's happiness there because you have been taught, and you have been brought to this particular point where all the angels in Heaven are waiting to see in which direction you are going to face. Because this is the moment when you were given the chance to turn your back against God -- I told you, you know -- I said you didn't have to be confirmed -- I told you that it was within your power to say No . . .

- - - Happiness is the smile upon the face of God in Heaven above because all the investment that He's made in you is returning a precious dividend right now . . .

- - - Happiness is the smile on the face of all the saints who have lived, and died, as they call back to us from Heaven above and say to you, on this day and in this place you are doing the

right thing -- we know! Remember your promise.

Happy is the man who walks in the way of the Lord. If you want to be unhappy, go against Him. You may think for a while it will be fun. But when you have to pay the due of the Devil, you will be tortured. No man who has ever loved and served God completely has ever become miserable. The happiest people I know are the ones who love God and who claim His love.

I would be less than honest if I did not tell you that I was delighted in your choice of your Confirmation Class Hymn, the hymn that we've just sung. For happiness is in the knowledge that God who made earth and heaven, darkness and light, will continue to guard you...waking or sleeping...and when you and I die we will be kept in His mighty keeping. There in that great moment we have the joy of knowing that God will never turn His back against us.

Happiness is now....and always.....in the knowledge of God's love.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHEN THE DAY WAS FULLY COME"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The text is from the Epistle for the day:

*"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come
they were all with one accord in one place,
and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."*

...and I suggest to you that it means exactly what it says -- with one mind
and in one spirit they were in one place and completely and totally possessed
by the Spirit of God.....

....it can happen

....it does happen

....it did happen.....

And this day in the Calendar of the Church reminds us of that tremendous truth.

There are some who have some difficulty in trying to understand what
Pentecost really means, because, you see, we deal with picture-language.
Those who were there knew that something had happened. And whenever some-
thing takes place that's out of the ordinary, you're hard-pressed to explain
it or to describe it, so you have to use picture-language. So that's why
you get terminology as: "like the sound of a rushing mighty wind" - - or
"like cloven tongues of fire" - - or "speaking in tongues" . . . so that any-
one who happened to be there could have understood clearly what a man was
saying. But for our purpose this morning, let's zero in on this truth:
"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit."

Now having said that, let me shift gears for a moment.

I saw her on Friday of this past week, the first time in perhaps six
or seven years. I knew she was having problems, and as will be true in some

cases, there are those who shy away from the very place that can help them most. Not that man is by nature an independent creature -- there might be some degree of reticence, one might be ashamed to lay bare his soul -- whatever may have been the reasons in her case, there was this tendency to shy away from the church to which she belonged. She still remained in our prayers.

As she sat down in the chair in my study, before I had a single word to say to her she said, "The bitterness -- it's gone! I feel so different this morning, as though something has been lifted!"

...she didn't have to say that. I could tell by looking into her eyes, I could tell as she sat there, that something had happened.

Significantly enough, the very same day another parishioner came, and I remember when I last ministered to her, distraught and anxious, and likewise filled with hate.....but on Friday it was different. There was even marked physical improvement - - - something had happened!

There's an envelope, and a rather fat one at that, that I've tucked away in my personal files -- it's a nine- or ten-page letter written in long-hand by a girl that was confirmed at the altar here in Saint Luke Church -- how many years ago? - six or seven years ago, perhaps.....since that day of Confirmation she slipped from grace, she's committed any and every sin that you might be able to name, I dare say. Next-to-the-last time that I saw her she was institutionalized, receiving rehabilitation as a drug addict....

....now she writes me, "I'm sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, Pastor, I have been born again and I'm married to a man who's been born again! And when I last saw my brother, and you know what my brother was like -- it's happening to him, too. And I am praying for other members of my family . . . "

....small wonder, then, that when I saw her mother on Friday of this week that I could say to myself, something's happened! ...and the only explanation is this: these three people are being filled by the Spirit of God! - - - and that's the meaning of Pentecost. God has taken over. They are possessed by God. Their thoughts, and their deeds are God-inspired. It can, and it does happen.

Now on this day of Pentecost, if it is to happen -- how will it happen? Some time ago, several years in fact, I remember listening to Red Barber being interviewed. He had just written a book bearing the title, "Rhubarb And The Catbird Seed." The interviewer said, after a while, "It looks to me as though you're a self-made man." And he responded by saying, "There's no such thing as a self-made man. As for me, there were always forces at work that were affecting my life and I tried to respond favorably."

I suggest to you this morning that there are always forces at work on your life and my life, and none is greater than the force of God. And you and I ought to allow ourselves to respond favorably to that force.

Now let's go back and look again at this day of Pentecost. It happened, I dare say to you, as a 'happening' -- because nothing ever just happens. It occurred as a 'happening' because there were forces at work, there were conditions that were being met. As an example, they were told by Jesus Christ to wait, to wait expectantly - - and so that handful of people were waiting out of obedience to Jesus Christ. He had said, "Now you stay here in Jerusalem for these 40 or 50 days -- you stay right here." And then He made His promise to them that something was going to happen, and He'd be involved in what was going to happen. So out of sheer obedience to Him they waited - - - they waited on the Lord.

My friend, I say to you with all the strength of my soul this morning, that God alone knows the good that could happen in your life if you would only wait for the Lord and give Him a chance to do it. You see, we are by nature impatient. Some of us aren't about to wait for somebody else -- we want to do it our way. Chances are we haven't enough wisdom to do it our way, and not enough strength, and surely not enough patience.

You review sometimes the significant things that happen in life and discover all over again how in God's wisdom there is a waiting period. You may smile broadly at this and think I'm a very naive person, that I should even respond in this way, but the older I become the more I can see the value that God had in mind that children are not born instantly -- that even that nine-month period of waiting is an absolute necessity, in more than one instance, to get ready, to adjust to a brand new life, and to make the proper preparation to assume the responsibility that comes with the birth of a child. The day of Pentecost fully came only after a waiting period had run its course.

I regretted very much reading the news report that says in Sweden these days that there is such a thing as instant divorce -- that any couple without children under sixteen years of age can walk in and make application for divorce and get it. Now I know there are times when perhaps divorce is the answer, maybe not a very good answer but perhaps the only realistic answer. But I know in my ministry I have seen the good that has come from people, and through people, and to people when they've taken time to think a thing through, from God's point of view.

I would not favor instant marriage any more than I would favor instant divorce, because in the marriage service that we now use in Saint Luke Church we say that marriage is not something to be entered into lightly or unadvisedly,

but deliberately.....and that means that there's a great deal to be said for a waiting period before one assumes the marriage vow, because when a man says 'yes' to a woman, and a woman says 'yes' to a man, that means the absolute necessity to assume a kind of responsibility that you never had before!

It was made plain to me, when I was in my next-to-the-last year in high school, that I was meant to be a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I was the most impatient kid that ever went through college and theological seminary, I dare say, because I could hardly wait until I could give myself, with complete devotion, to shepherding a congregation. Now when I look back and see how in God's plan those seven years of waiting were an absolute necessity. "When the day of Pentecost was fully come - - " -- a waiting period had run its course, a waiting period in which they were told to anticipate that God would break through, God would come to them, God would be their comforter

--- and that word 'comforter' you know, comes from the

Latin which means He would make them strong!

Having said all of this, I hope you recognize the fact that when they were waiting they were waiting expectantly, because they were forced to recognize that now they had failed, they had disappointed their Lord -- they were the ones who had denied Him, they were the ones who had forsaken Him -- one of their number had been the betrayer. They had a period of time in which they accused one another. Even good people can be very cruel, they had to get some things out of their system. Tradition has it that when Peter walked among the disciples after the death of Jesus Christ, and even after the Resurrection, some of the disciples would walk up to him and make the sound like the crowing of a rooster, to humiliate him, to remind him of what he did to his Lord.....how cruel can you be!

I'd like to believe that during this waiting period they got some of this out of their system, as perhaps when they went on their knees they earnestly

prayed that the God in whom they were going to put their trust would be expected to do something for them that they couldn't do for themselves. The longer God gives me the privilege to serve as a minister, the more I recognize how when some people fall on their own knees, how terribly ashamed they are of themselves, and they'd never let anybody else know it -- and how they'd give almost anything if they could be different from what they are. And then, rarely, but it does happen, transformation sets in as they wait expectantly and obediently upon the Lord to do for them what they cannot do for themselves.

Well, that's the meaning of Pentecost, my friend, upon a handful of people the Spirit of God came, and they were completely possessed. And they're the ones who turned the world upside-down. They're the ones who changed the course of history. They're the ones who gave Exhibit A to the testimony that God is able to do a mighty work. And because they allowed themselves to be Spirit-possessed, you and I are here right now. For we're part of the result -- they went everywhere, completely possessed by God.

I close this sermon with a challenge, to myself as well as to you: only God knows the transformation that could happen in this congregation if more of us gave ourselves to waiting -- -- that does not mean simply in a passive way -- but waiting. And that really means giving God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ a chance to take over. I dare you to try it.....and then you'll know what Pentecost means.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Communion Meditation - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Trinity Sunday

June 17, 1973

"MISSION POSSIBLE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His
Son, Jesus Christ our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

"This is the mission, if you wish to accept it - - -"

...isn't that the introductory statement for that well-known television program that ends somehow with these words:

" - - - this tape will self-destruct in (so-many) seconds!" ?

As I come to this sacred desk this morning I am mindful of the fact that there are those within this group of people present this morning who will be coming to the altar of the Lord for the first time to receive the Sacrament of the Altar. Now my words, I dare say, are directed primarily to them.

How can I explain to you again what the Sacrament means? Some of us who have been receiving the Sacrament for decade after decade still come to the Table of the Lord and discover that the Sacrament is clothed in mystery, for the very fact that God himself is mystery. If you and I could fully understand God, then we would have the same degree of sensitivity and spiritual understanding as God himself.

But there are some things that we do understand, but always within our limitations. And that's one reason for the Incarnation. God stooped to our level, and in Jesus Christ all the fulness of God was able to dwell, that we within our limitations might understand God. But what does it mean to receive the Sacrament? What happens?

Be patient with me for a minute when I say to each of you, every single one of us is on special assignment. In the mind of God each one serves a particular purpose. For life is God's precious gift to us, life itself is a miracle. From the Christian understanding of life, it's been meant to be spent purposefully, and what is that except to say, to accomplish a special mission.

And what is God's special mission for each of us who comes to know Him? The special mission that God has in mind for us is that we should love and serve Him, and that we should be to other people as a little Christ. It's as daring and as wonderful as that, the mission that God has in mind for us.

Now, what was the mission that Jesus Christ had?

His mission was to make God real, to love people, to love them into the Kingdom. And what is it to love a person? -- to love a person is always to work for that person's good. You and I cannot perform the deed of redemption as Jesus Christ did in His supreme mission, but having fulfilled His mission, He gave to each of us a mission, that we should be in this world as His hands, His feet, His lips, and that we should be to other people in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

But what happens when you find yourself confronted by the so-called unlovable? What does one do when one is meant to be kind to those to whom it's not easy to be kind? How does one love those who are, if you please, unlovable? Do we expect God to sign an excuse blank for us and say, "I never intended you to love them"? -- how dare we think that God would ever speak to us like that! For God is one who loved the whole world and sent Jesus Christ to demonstrate that love. And He came into a world that could be hostile and bitter, in a world that was filled with the crucifiers...the betrayers...and

the deny-ers. But the mission for Jesus Christ was never altered, just as Jesus Christ does not alter your mission and my mission to love and to serve Him. And we love Him as we love people -- "By this shall all men know that Jesus Christ dwells in your heart, if you take to yourself the need of another" . . . and from the Christian standpoint that's what love is: to always meet the need of another person, even if it has to be made sacrificially.

But you and I run out of love.....

...you and I run out of patience.....

...you and I run out of kindness.....

.....you and I run out of the God-perspective.....

May I suggest to you that that's one reason why Jesus Christ gives us the Sacrament. For if the Sacrament is anything at all it's the place of renewal, and replenishment, where Jesus Christ comes to us all over again and says to us, "Here I am -- I give you myself."

I have never pretended to be able to explain to anybody just how this happens. But that doesn't throw me for a loop too much. For there are any number of things day by day to which I am exposed which I can't fully explain but which I simply experience and draw the full benefit. Let me give you a very homespun illustration:

-- I am indebted to a physician who occasionally checks me out. He asks that I take a series of tests, in order that I might discover what I need to improve my situation. Then invariably he will prescribe, and right now I'm taking at least one pill a day that in his judgment he thinks I ought to have.....

....now when I reach for the bottle and look for the formula, I can't explain it to you. I don't know that language. I only know

that when I take that pill, upon the advice of the physician that I trust, my situation is improved, a corrective sets in.

- - Crossmother has been living with us now for some time --- she's pushing 90. And occasionally I discover Winifred setting out Crossmother's medication. We live closely enough with her now that we can see the difference that sets in when she may not take enough of the medication. Her situation varies according to the medication that she receives.

And I suppose in the sight of God we're all children. And maybe we go back and reduce ourselves to the level where we take a medication simply because it's good for us. I can imagine myself saying to my physician, "Well, Doctor, I don't know what you've discovered, I don't know how you diagnose it, I don't know how you label it, and now that I've had the prescription fulfilled I don't know what it means." But he could, if he wanted to, in plain unvarnished jargon say to me, "Well take it! It's good for you." And then I discover for myself that when I don't take it, I suffer from the fact that I've denied myself certain benefits.

Now I'm about to suggest to you that as you and I run our course through life, we always run the risk of becoming self-destructive -- not to heed the advice of a trustworthy physician is to run the risk of becoming self-destructive. Jesus Christ is the Good Physician. He recommends to us: "Take -- eat! It's good for you!"

...whatever your ailment is, my friend, in the sight of God, the Sacrament, properly understood, is a necessary corrective.

* * * *

(This scene transcribed as recorded)

"LOOKING FOR GOD - ?"

HUSH THE mind, O God, and quiet the spirit. Perhaps at this time and in this place it could be that the voice that we hear, feeble as it may be, could be an echo of that Eternal Voice down through the corridors of time.
Amen.

It is New York City, I tell you, that's the one place where the unexpected can always be expected. Strange things happen in that city. You can add this to your list if you don't mind: the woman who died, and when they read her will they discovered that she had left the bulk of her estate to one beneficiary, and that beneficiary was God.

Now when the lawyer got hold of the will he had no alternative -- he had to process it and proceed in the routine fashion. He had to try to locate the legal heir. When he made his final report to the Court he included this one simple sentence: The named beneficiary is not to be found anywhere in the City of New York.

But where is God to be found?

We say this is His world. We say His work is being done. We say His purpose is being fulfilled. Then where is He? Where would you look for God. Where would you discover His hand?

The Gospel Lesson that was read today as we mark the festival of the Nativity of St. John, the Baptist, Mark's included these words, and properly so, from the Lesson: "What manner of child will this be, since the hand of the Lord is with him?" So I ask you this question, as this sermon dedicated

to Paul Mertens is being preached: Where will you look for the hand of the Lord?

There is also another passage of Scripture which is enough to grip the mind of any man. That passage of Scripture reads in this fashion:

"You shall be as Christ is."

Dare a man believe that? Is it possible for us to be in this world as Jesus Christ was?

Back up a minute now, recall the kind of person He was.

At a particular time in history God did something that He had never done before -- He exposed us to the life and spirit of Jesus Christ. And how was it manifested? By a man, if you please . . . who went around from place to place touching other people's lives. Whenever He came into contact with them He improved their situation -- He left them better than what they were before He found them. Some chap, a Gospel writer, if you please, reflecting upon the ministry of Jesus Christ, summed it all up magnificently by saying He was a man who went about doing good - - - which is simply another way of saying the hand of the Lord was with Him and He saw to it that God's work was done.

I tell you this morning as I stand at this sacred desk that I have my moments when I suffer a great deal of despair. I catalog myself -- you don't have to categorize me -- I brood.....I brood more sometimes than I would like to brood. But I'm not simply a brooder - - - I'm a 'brooding optimist.'

I know two things. One thing, the world is headed for Hell. Perhaps at a clip, at a pace it's never known before.

I also know something else: it wasn't meant to go to Hell, and that God in His own way is raising up people who come in and free us from the clutch of the Devil - - get hold of us and re-orient us, and turn us around in the right direction, and when we fall, enable us to stand up and keep

going. That's why I'm a breeding optimist. I know the Devil is at work, but I also know the Devil is not the only one who is at work. God is always at work. Love is stronger than hate. Life is going to be greater than death, and that evil, strong as it may be, is only the second strongest force in the world....that good is greater.

And I know that God, to accomplish His purpose and to see that His work is being done, reaches every now and then for a particular person and He says, "You are my man" - - - and then He lets that person loose in the world, and like as not without any structure, without any committee, without any organisation,....just lets him loose, and lets him become to us as the mind and the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Well, such a person is Paul Hertens.

I don't think it's too much to tell you that in my book he's the Albert Schweitzer of the Lutheran Church in Liberia, West Africa, with all the fine connotations that come to your mind by such a description.

Now I want to balance that by telling you this: within the past week I read of the interview that somebody had with a man who some years ago was a candidate for the high office of the President of the United States. They asked this man to comment upon the sad political state to which we are now exposed. I knew a great burden on my heart when I listened to what he had to say. He even spoke profanely, as much as to say as he threw up his hands and his arms, "What's the use?" - - as though any good thing now remains inconsequential.

Against the background of a wicked world, when forces so great and powerful are at work to destroy so much that we cherish, some of us are prone to say, anything that I might do is inconsequential. But then I take heart and I remember a man like Paul Hertens, who asks only one thing from life: the privilege to serve! - - the privilege to help - - the privilege

to do what a physician was meant to do -- any physician anywhere -- to improve another man's condition, if at all humanly possible.

And I'm happy to tell you, my friends, it's happening! It is occurring in the world today, here and there there are men who allow Jesus Christ to possess their lives. When that happens you and I are exposed to a bit of Heaven here on earth, and that's why some of us are willing to go on living tomorrow, and the day after that, because we draw the benefit from this kind of thing.

I want to tell you a story now that I've told you before. And don't become impatient with me because you've heard it before -- you've sung hymns that you have sung before....you've heard anthems that you have heard sung repeatedly. If the truth inherent lies in a single thing, why can't it be repeated? So bear with me now while I tell you this story again.

It's supposed to have happened in the South Sea Islands. A man went out there as a missionary of Jesus Christ. He thought himself to be the first missionary ever to go to those people, so with a great deal of ardor he began to tell them about Jesus Christ, who He was and what He did, the manner of life He lived, how He treated people. And as he told the story of Jesus Christ their faces began to light up, and one lady spoke up and said, "Why, we know that man! He used to live here!"

...and the missionary who thought he was the first one ever to go to those people said, "You're mistaken -- Jesus Christ was in Palestine, thousand upon thousand of miles away from here."

"Oh, but we know him -- he used to live here! Everything that you say about this man, this Man did! That's the way he treated us! That's the way he talked about God. He made

God very real to us, and he opened our eyes to the way we ought to treat one another. We know him. He used to live here!"

Well, what really happened was this: that years before another missionary had gone out, assigned by the Board, to another place, but he was shipwrecked. And he went to this island and he never got off it. And he stayed there....he had no means of communication with the home Board. While he lived there he was the demonstration of Jesus Christ in a human being. The hand of God was there! He was to them as Jesus Christ. I suppose they could have said of him as they said of another missionary: "Before he came, there was no light. After he went away, there was no darkness."

Let me read for you how the poet put it, to show you the tremendous value that could be placed upon the worth of a human being:

"God stepped out in space, and He looked around,
and He said, 'I'm lonely.
I'll make me a world.'
Then God walked around and God looked around on
all that He had made.
He looked at His sun, He looked at His moon.
And He looked at His little stars.
He looked on His world with all its living things, and
God Said, 'I'm lonely still.'
Then God sat down on the side of a hill where He
could think,
By a deep wide river He sat down with His head
in His hands.
And God thought and thought till He thought,
'I'll make me a man.'"

And that's the crowning glory of God's creation -- human beings, let loose in the world.....a man like Paul Hertens.... - - let me finish my sentence -- a man like you! For the potential lies within every single one of us to be to somebody else as Jesus Christ. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

" A NATION UNDER GOD"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His son,
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

On this Sunday next before Independence Day, a national holiday,
the sermon bears the title "A Nation Under God."

Just how it happened to be that way, and who it was who chose him,
I cannot tell you, but I can report to you that it was back in December,
1777, that a preacher by the name of Dushay (?) composed a prayer.

Now preachers have been known to pray, of course they have, but
this was the first time that a preacher was asked to pray this kind of
a prayer. It happened to have been the first prayer ever to be offered
when an American Congress was gathered together. Now when that man
Dushay, the preacher who happened to have been chosen, prayed the way
he did, he struck the kind of note that's been struck ever since.

When a man is asked to pray in behalf of his country, he usually
asks God in no uncertain manner to bless his country. He may use such
phrases as these, the very phrases that came out of that first prayer that
was offered back there in December, 1777 . . .

-- " . . look in mercy upon the American States . . "

-- " . . support our cause . . "

-- " . . give us wisdom . . "

-- " . . let the enemy know how wrong they are . . "

Well, let me read the prayer for you.....I have a copy of it in front of me....and then you yourself can be something of a judge as to its sense, and its substance.

Prayer preacher Dushay in this manner:

"O LORD, Our Heavenly Father, high and mighty King of kings, Lord of lords, Who dost from Thy throne behold all the dwellers on earth and reignest with power supreme and uncontrolled over all the nations, over all the empires, over all the kingdoms, over all the governments; Look down in mercy, we beseech Thee, upon these, the American States.

We have fled to Thee from the rod of the oppressor and thrown ourselves on your glorious protection, desiring henceforth to be dependent only on Thee. To Thee we have appealed for the righteousness of our cause. To Thee we now look for that countenance of support which only You can give.

Therefore, Heavenly Father, under Thy nurturing care take us, give us wisdom and counsel and valour in the field. Defeat the malicious designs of our cruel adversaries, convince them of the unrightness of their cause, and if they persist in sanguinary purpose, O let the voice of Thine own unerring justice sounding in their hearts constrain them to drop the weapons of war from their unnerved hands in the day of battle.

By Thy presence, O God of wisdom, and through the counsel of this honorable assembly, enable them to settle things on the best and surest foundation, that the scene of blood may be speedily closed, that order, harmony and peace may be effectually restored and truth, justice and religion and piety prevail and flourish among the people.

Preserve the health of our bodies and the vigour of our minds. Shower down upon us and the millions that we here represent such temporal blessings as Thou seest expedient for us in this world. Crown us with the everlasting glory in the world to come. All of this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen."

8 there you have it, my friend -- a patriot and a God-fearing chap all rolled up into one, seemingly a preacher with two hands, holding in one the Bible and in the other the American flag -- -- much like that highly revered Lutheran preacher in a Virginia community a number of years ago not too far away from this spot -- who when he went to the sacred desk had on two outfits.....

....one was his preaching robe, and underneath that the uniform of the Regimental Army. And when he had to make a choice as to which one he would discard, old Peter Muhlenberg (or young Peter Muhlenberg at that time) had no problem at all. He threw aside the preacher's garb, and with the Regimental uniform marched down to join the ranks. He was every inch a patriot -- -- a God-fearing patriot, if you please.

But as I come to this sacred desk on this Sunday so near Independence Day itself, I am fully aware of the fact that we're not nearly as patriotic as once we were. Oddly enough, we who came back from Africa in mid-winter discovered that we had been among peoples in different parts of Africa who were fully aware of their nationalism, their patriotic fervor was a very real thing. But who wants to be patriotic in the United States these days?

It's a far cry, you see, from that time when in a quiet village Independence Day would come -- a time of much excitement. And even though you did have the roman candles, the sparklers, the fire-crackers, you name it! -- there was always a time when the band went down to the village square, or to the plaza or to the central park, and the town mayor or the county judge would make a speech.....and how they prayed for the United States of

America.....and how enthusiastic they were for this great land of ours. But one is hard-pressed to find people who talk so vervently in a patriotic theme these days.

I suppose there will be those who will criticize us for raising the emblem of our nation on the church lawn and flying it there day after day. I suppose there will be some. And they tell me there are reasons why this is true

-- we're no longer the great power we thought we were, that's what they tell us. When some of us were youngsters in school we were taught that America was Number One -- name any field, and we excelled . . .

...we don't talk that way so quickly any more.

There are other nations that excel us.

-- and we read the morning paper with some apprehension to find out what's happening to the United States dollar . . .

-- we find it expedient to join with other nations in exploring outer space, not only that we may benefit from their know-how, but we say that they may benefit from ours. It's a joint endeavor. But it's an admission that they can be as smart if not smarter than we . . .

They tell us that we can't be patriotic as once we were because now that we're internationally-minded, we've discovered that other nations have good people too, that maybe they have had a right to wage war the way they've waged it, even though it was against us....

...and then with what's been happening lately, when I've heard things that I've never heard

before in my life-time:

" . . impeach the President . . "

" . . clean house . . "

...to use the language of our British cousins: "Let the Government fall!

- - let it be replaced!"

Now in company with most of you I have suffered my measure of disillusionment. Surely I've known a measure of despair. It's my nature to trust. It's my nature, as some of you know full well, to believe in the inherent goodness of people. And when the day comes that I can no longer appeal to the goodness in your nature I shall no longer be worthy of being your Pastor. And it's my nature to support people who are in positions of responsibility.

But I know what's been happening these days. It's a great time for speculation, for apprehension which is born of uncertainty. It's a great time to criticize. It's a field day for those who want to condemn. But as I told you some weeks ago, I'm not so sure that any of us has a right to condemn a person if we haven't prayed for him.

Now if I'm going to rebuke you in this sermon, it's because I have first rebuked myself. Any sermon in which I take my people to task is a sermon which I have first tried on my own soul for size. Now having heard me say that, let me tell you this: honestly now, I don't know when I last prayed for the Governor of this state by name. I don't know when I last prayed for those who represent us in the House of Delegates, by name. The President of the United States has fared a little bit better on this score -- I have been praying for him, a little more earnestly lately. But more often than not in the past year-and-a-half I didn't pray for him.

...when did you last pray for the Governor of this state?

...when did you last pray for our two United States Senators?

(can you name them?)

It was a rare thing when I discovered that a few years back, when I first became your Pastor, two members came to me and said, "Pastor, we're going over to the State House at Annapolis. We'd like you to go along." And when I inquired as to their mission -- "Well, we have been doing it for some time -- we have been taking a day off in the course of the year just to go over and meet with our delegates, meet with our representatives. We're not asking them to do anything for us. We're just there to tell them that we appreciate their good work, and we want them to continue giving us good representation, we want to assure them of our moral support . . ."

...Frank Harris still does that. Paul Miller, now of blessed memory, was his companion through the years. The two of them did that sort of thing. It's a rare thing, you see!

Now, what is it to pray for your country?

What is it to pray for your representative leadership?

To pray for them is to ask that they may see things from God's point of view! To pray for them does not necessarily mean that you condone what they are doing. When you pray for them you're asking that they become amenable to the leading of God! As Christians we're in duty bound to pray for our country, and I honestly believe that God uses nations as He uses individuals, and we ought to be increasingly mindful of what God's purpose may be for us.

That leads me to the text for this sermon:

"God be merciful to us, and bless us, and

cause his face to shine upon us;
That his way may be known upon earth,
his saving health to all peoples."

(Psalm 67:1-2)

Now when you read that text you have to read it to its conclusion.

That's the trouble that I find with that preacher Dushay's prayer. I think when he prayed he was praying a very selfish prayer for the United States of America. He was putting blinders on the eyes of God, as though he wanted God to give us undivided attention and pay no attention to anybody else except to punish them while He was blessing us.

No man has a right to talk to God like that. No man has a right to ask God to bless him at the expense of somebody else. Dushay's prayer was a good one, but it wasn't good enough. When he asked God to bless us as American States, he should have gone on in the words of the Psalmist: "Bless us that we might become a blessing to others"!

And I tell you with all the strength that I can command, I still believe that God has a purpose for the United States of America. I still believe that God is seeing fit to work through us. For some of us who have been privileged to travel in other parts of the world we have seen something of the lengthened hand of the United States of America and how it has brought a measure of improvement to other people and raised the level from the deprivation they have known before we came.

And because God uses nations as He uses people, then we need to pray for our nation. I make no apology whatsoever, as the Senior Pastor of this congregation, for having become instrumental in suggesting that there be a flag pole on the church lawn, that the whole community can see something of our loyalty to the United States.....just as I make no apology so that every Sun-

day when you come here, immediately in front of you is not only the Christian flag but the flag that represents our nation as well. For we are a nation, and we are a nation under God, and we need to pray that God will make us strong in order that His purpose might be accomplished through us.

Just as He uses different people to accomplish certain things, so He uses different nations to accomplish certain things. And if you want a measure of tonic, my friends, as over against the despair and the disillusionment which is so popular today, maybe we'd better get back to our knees....pray.....

"God be merciful to us as a nation,
and cause Your face to shine upon us,
that we might become a blessing to others . . . "

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHILE IT IS DAY"

WE HEAR so many voices, O God.
Perhaps for a little while in
this place we may be made quiet
enough so that the voice that is
heard becomes the echo of Your
Voice through the corridors of
time. Amen.

Whatever else the sign said in the language of the land, this was
the English translation: Monument of Art. And somewhere I thought the
word Museum also caught my eye. I'll document all of this for you much
later when hopefully my films will be developed. I am reasonably certain
that the marker designating the Monument of Art will show up in one of
those color transparencies.

And what did I find beyond that sign in that country on the other
side of Winston Churchill's 'Iron Curtain'? It was an ancient church,
that's what it was, but not designated as a place for worship primarily.
The sign was not erected there as a measure of encouragement for people
to enter and to pray. It was simply to remember that at one time there
was such a thing, and at one time it did serve a purpose. Now it's being
preserved as a relic of the past. No wonder, then, when I saw that group
of young people coming up the hill, with musical instruments in hand,
that they never so much as cast an eye in the direction of those handsomely
hinged doors that marked the entrance to that church, but rather they
walked around to the other side and there they took their places, so that
the wall of the church would serve as a protective barrier against the
blowing wind as they presented their performance, their concert.

....my mind flashed quickly back to what I had seen the day before in Budapest....groups of young pre-school children, all walking behind their leader, cleanly scrubbed, neatly dressed. They were to be taken to day care centers which the state authorizes and provides. They would be supervised by state-paid staff. The state encourages the father and the mother to work because the role of the worker has been glorified. According to the teaching of the state within the Soviet sphere, it's by the worker that the new world will become a reality....it's by the hand of the worker that the new day will dawn.....

....and then also, if you please, by having both the father and the mother working, they may elevate their status economically, and that means that they can take advantage of some of the merchandise which serves as bait, if you please. But day by day the mind and the soul of the pre-school youngster is being fashioned by the state.

I heard a report that I pass on to you because even though I cannot document it, I have reason to believe that it does indicate what may happen. The youngsters are gathered together and the leader who is paid by the state may say to the youngsters, "Now close your eyes -- and if it's a piece of candy that you want, let's ask what they call 'God' to give it to us." So the youngster closes his eyes, and he asks for a piece of candy. And when he's told to open his eyes, is the candy there? Of course it isn't there! The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't respond to that kind of thing -- it's not His nature. And He

doesn't exist, no matter how wonderful He is, just to give candy to pre-school age children.....

.....after a little while the same person will say to the youngster, "It's a piece of candy that you want? Well, close your eyes, and maybe the state will provide it." So the youngster closes his eyes, and of course, as you know, the leader has put the piece of candy in front of the youngster, and when his eyes are opened it's there. And if the inference is not made plain by this time, it's the duty of the person paid by the state to have the youngster understand that it's the state that's the rewarder of those who turn to it, that it's the state that's the giver of good things, it's the state that's to be trusted.

Now I'm fully aware, perhaps more so than you may think that I am, that when I stand at the sacred desk this morning I stand here after having been outside the continental limitations of the United States for the past three-and-a-half weeks. Only a limited amount of that time was spent within two countries of the Soviet sphere. I am perfectly aware of the fact that some of us sometimes forget that to the crowning credit of the present administration, it's brought in an era of new and good relationships with Russia and with China, and this is exactly as it ought to be! We ought to be able to talk with one another, we ought to be able to keep the lines of communication open. But you and I dare never forget, the Communist-dominated land gives no blessing to religion, does not encourage religion. It may tolerate it, but certainly does not encourage it. So that we ought not to forget that we do live in that part of the world that has it as the description has put it, the "free world."

Now having said all of that, I want to talk to you now about four people, a mother, a daughter, and a son. And then I'll talk to you about the fourth person later.

First the daughter -- Muditja. She's 22 years of age. She's a school teacher....charming, intelligent. Thanks to Hungarian-born Ethel Anderson, who was with us, who served as our translator, I can tell you what I am about to share with you. In answer to my question: Do you go to church? -- here's what she had to say: Usually, never to the same church -- that is, she doesn't go twice in succession to the same place to worship. Yes, she goes to worship. But because she's paid by the state, she must in duty bound support the teaching of the state, and the state has no place for religion. So when she does go to church she has to think twice as to where she was the last time and now where she'll go this time, lest her presence be noted, and it will be held against her.

Now her brother. 24 years of age, he's just completed his military training. Thanks to our interpreter, I learned when I put the question to him, "Do you have a chaplain?"

"No."

"Did you go to church?"

His reply, as I gleaned it through Ethel -- had he gone to church, he would have been subject to discipline and probably been put into jail.

Now the mother, Lenka. Devout Christian, 22 years ago when the second of her children was born, she wanted to have the child baptized. Under cover of darkness she goes to another village and the child is baptized. She also told us when Kidaly, the Hungarian composer, had died, because the state had to recognize his Christian commitment, they allowed a Christian burial and the priest did officiate. But when it was televised

nation-wide, all the viewer saw was the state official giving a eulogy, but never so much as to see how the priest participated.

Now the fourth person. He was the first Hungarian that I really ever met. I met him in 1946 for the first time. Then I met him again in 1947 when I went to Lund in Sweden for the first meeting of the Lutheran World Federation after World War II.....Bishop Leas Ordase. His face reflects the essence of sainthood. And when he spoke to us here in the States and when he spoke to us again in Sweden, he gave us to understand that there was no question about it -- he could see the handwriting on the wall: the day would come when in Hungary -- the Hungary that he loved -- he would be intimidated, he would be the subject of trumped-up charges. They would imprison him.....which they did. Now when I asked about him, even the man-of-the-cloth to whom I put the question had little sensitivity toward him at all.....he's isolated, he's removed from the mainstream, he has no influence. Yet it was Bishop Ordase who in July of 1947 spoke to us these words: "We must work while it is day."

It seems a very simple wisdom which we recognize in these words of our Saviour. In such understandable language He teaches us the deepest science. Every hearer can understand these words. It will remain good wisdom until the end of time! In spite of many inventions which man has made to brighten and to lighten the night, the peasant during the harvest time still must admit: We must work while it is day!

However, these words are more than a simple sentence. They should lead us to a better understanding of the world situation. They should awaken the zeal of all Christians.....they should wake us up if we feel inclined to quietly sleep. The enemy does not rest. He is always at work. In one of the parables of our Lord we read how the evil one corrupts the

seed in the night. But he works not only at night....he is always at work!
And how eagerly he works!

May I ask you, dear brethren, if you have observed this -- I think we cannot avoid seeing the results of his labor. It all stands before us so vividly -- everywhere ruin, and need, and hate, and sin -- all show clearly the work of the enemy. Yes, the old enemy always at work.

Now what will become of us if in this world, only the enemy shall be at work? When we see the world in all its need, is it possible that we can say anything else then? We must work while it is day.

And that leads me to the text for this, my first sermon to you upon my return -- the recorded words of our Blessed Lord, the 4th verse of the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"We must work the work of him who sent us
while it is day. The night comes when
no one can work."

In conclusion I want to remind you that Ed Starbruck, in his book, "The Psychology of Religion" has written some interesting and most warning statistics about the age at which conversion normally occurs, or at which you make the stamp upon the individual by which he is molded for the years to come. Says this writer:

"Conversion can occur as early as seven or eight.
It increases gradually to the age of ten or eleven.
It increases rapidly to the age of sixteen. It
declines steeply up to the age of twenty, and after
thirty it is very rare."

The enemy is at work. He's focusing upon pre-school age children. He is concentrating upon the emerging adolescent. He is succeeding. I'm haunted by it. A group of teenage musicians who never so much as look in the direction of a church...and the only purpose that's served by that church is to provide a protective wall against the blowing wind. We call ours a

free world. Never have I returned from a trip for which my ardor is greater to concentrate anew upon the responsibility that rests upon us in this, the free world, to mold and fashion the minds of those who are young. With us it is still day. And we must work His works while it is day, for the night comes when no man can work. It's as serious as all that.

God who sits in the Heavens is always a God of Judgment. He looks upon us now and He is saying to us who are here in the free world: "What are you doing with the freedom that you have?"

He knows the answer.

I'm not so sure that we're aware of the
answer that He's getting.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"PROBLEMS, ANYONE?"

WE HAVE so little time, O God, to do this kind of thing, to come together and give some measure of attention to Your truth. That we might make the most of the opportunity, we'd be very happy if Your Holy Spirit would lay hold upon us right now. Amen.

It probably doesn't come as news to you when I tell you I have the good fortune to be married to an understanding and forgiving wife. It's been the secret, naturally, for these thirty-three years of married life that we've known. As someone who knows us has very properly said, "She'd have to be understanding and forgiving."

When she tallies up that list of my shortcomings, I'm sure that quite high on the list is the fact that on occasion I bring home unexpected guests for dinner. I've done my best to convince her that four baked potatoes could feed six people, and that maybe there could be a substitute for the dessert by going back again to the pantry shelf. The ace card that I have been able to manage is this: well, if you think you have a problem, think of the occasion when our Blessed Lord had four thousand people on His hands who showed up for dinner!

Now that, by the way, is the subject of today's Gospel lesson. I don't know how well you listened as Genevieve read (she reads very well, by the way)...and that Gospel lesson for today commands unusual respect. For while it deals with a particular incident, it deals with a tremendous truth that would hold all of us in good stead if only we'd give it proper heed.

It's the account, you know, of Jesus feeding the four thousand people.

I surely would like to have been around that day for a number of different reasons. One, it would have been a great thrill to hear and to see the Master-Praacher -- how He held people in the hollow of His hand -- how He gave them unforgettable word pictures of God -- how He made plain to them the power and the pardon and the purpose that God had in mind when He dealt with His children. They responded so well, they listened to him so earnestly that they went straight through the lunch hour. And it was only after He had finished preaching that it suddenly occurred to them that they had hunger pangs, and nothing by which to satisfy it.

Then somebody was aware of the problem.

Now, begin at that point. Somebody recognized the fact that they had a problem on their hands. I want to talk to you this morning about problems. We all have problems. Whatever may be your age, we have problems. We used to think that problems belonged only to people in middle age and a bit older. Now even youngsters have problems. Would you believe it when I tell you that not so long ago the younger of the two sons of the Assistant Pastor of this parish came over to the Parsonage of the Senior Pastor, and the four-year-old said: "I have a problem." So soon!

Some of us used to think that there was a period in life that was known as the problem-dealing period. But one day -- ah, there would come a time when we would reach a plateau, and all of our problems would be behind us. We went looking for that day, hoping that it might come, the day we might be able to shift ourselves in neutral and then just coast for a bit, in a problem-free era. Some of us have given up looking for that day. It just isn't there! It's been that elusive, it just doesn't come to pass.

A real reading of life is this: either that life is just one problem

after another, or, as somebody else has put it, as we go through life we simply exchange one set of problems for another.

Now let's talk about this problem business for a little while, even as we remind ourselves that Harry Emerson Fosdick, great and good preacher that he was, as he served as Professor of Homiletics at Union Seminary, used to say to his students, "Now remember when you get up to preach -- behind every person that you see, behind every face, there is a problem." Maybe that's why the wise Quakers, years ago, used to say that when they gathered together for divine worship their prayer-of-prayers would be, "Lord, speak to my condition." - - - a free translation would be, "Dear God, get to my problem, and help me with it quickly."

Now as you read that Gospel lesson for today again, or the parallel passage in John, you might discover a strategy or a procedure in handling problems.

Step Number One: Acknowledge the fact that you have a problem on your hand.

Now this is old hat for some of you. You know very well that this is why some people never get very far down the road, because of their failure to admit that they have a problem. This is our problem with them, to get them to admit that they have a problem, or they are the problem. Well, to the credit of the disciples, they did begin at that point and they realized they had a problem: These people ought to be fed.

Well then, what's the next step in problem solving? Having recognized the fact that you have a problem, you look around and you take an inventory. You not only assess the situation but you try to find out if you have any resources. Don't ever underestimate the necessity of doing that. But some people, I must tell you, never get to the second point because they continue

to stay with the first point:

"We have a problem"....."We have a problem"...."We have a problem."
...they lament it, they cry about it, they tell everybody
they see, and that's all that they ever do. They simply
re-state the fact: "We have a problem."

When I was in college, some of us pre-theological students used to enjoy talking with some of the kids who had other disciplines, such as those who were going to go into public school education. And I recall so well how some of them would tell me how they went down into Selinsgrove and would do their practice teaching, and then they were to come back and to talk with the professor in the department about the problems that they had encountered. And that, of course, was the purpose of practice teaching, to introduce you to the fact that you will have problems and then perhaps to learn how to deal with them.

And I remember how they used to tell me time and time again they'd have their session with old Professor Edmund Monroe Baumgart. When I say 'old' I say it fondly and with affection. So they would go in and they'd say "Professor Baumgart, we have a problem." He would say, "Well, tell me about it." And then they'd tell about the problem. And the only thing they could ever get from Professor Baumgart was this: "Say, that is a problem, isn't it?"

Well you don't get much help by simply having somebody tell you that you have a problem. And you yourself won't get very far by simply re-stating the fact to yourself. So that's why you have to go on to the second step, as did the disciples. Begin to take an inventory and to see if you have any resources.

Now they did that. Now there's a passage in the parallel Scripture

lesson in John that I'm sometimes sorry appears -- because somebody did take stock and come up with the answer: "Well, we have this much -- five loaves and two small fishes -- but what are they among so many?"

Alright, you take stock. And your inventory reveals to you that your resources are very, very meager. Now for heaven's sake, don't belabor that point! Don't shed tears unnecessarily because you don't have as much as you think you ought to have! I'm going to suggest to you out of my own experience -- whether you found it to be true in your lot in life or not, I cannot tell. And if you want to argue with me about it, that's your privilege. But I'm convinced that in the face of any problem that may confront us there is always enough at hand by which to begin. I'll grant you the resources may be meager, and you may think them to be inadequate. But my life has proven to me that there is always enough -- not very much, perhaps -- but there is enough by which to begin! This I most certainly believe.

You don't need to stay there and wish you were somewhere else, or that you wish you had somebody else's lot. You don't! We happen to be where we are, and for the moment we happen to be who we are. God made us, you know, dependent creatures. He never made any of us big enough to handle all of life's problems by ourselves.

So that leads me to suggest to you the next and very necessary step: having called the problem by name, having recognized the fact that you do have something by which to begin -- turn it over to God. You and I can't make that little become a lot. We just don't have the wisdom enough by which to do it, and we don't have enough time and enough patience to handle it. It's only as we give the little that we have into God's hand that we get a lot. And that's exactly what the disciples did. The five

barley loaves and the two small fishes fed the multitude, and they had enough, and something to spare.

Now man is a very proud and vain creature. He'd much rather lick life by himself. He'd much rather handle it by himself. But he may get along very well for a reasonable period of time. I suppose this is the burden that I carry in my heart more than anything else, when I see certain people, younger than myself, who aren't about to give God so much as the time of the day. They don't need Him! They're getting along very well, nicely, thank you! But there's a problem ahead. It's sure to loom on the horizon. No man -- no man is ever able to handle life by himself.

So, my friend, you with your problem, take what resources you have. Say, "Okay, God -- take over! Do with it what you can." Now I'm warning you, you may need a little time, but give Him a chance. And get ready for a miracle, because that's the way miracles happen.....only after God is given a chance. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE EGYPT MYTH"

Jer. 41:142

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

First let me tell you his name. It's a strange-sounding name and I won't blame you a bit if you don't recognize it. It's the kind of a name that I presume no mother here would think of giving to her own son, although he was a good man. The name is Cedaliah. You can read all about him in the Book of Jeremiah, particularly the 41st and the 42nd chapters.

He was a man who was highly regarded by the Chaldeans. Now the Chaldeans were the people who were in charge of taking care of the Jewish people after their nation had been occupied. They came in and took over. And they realized that somebody ought to represent the Jewish people -- not very many of them left any more. It was a very sad thing for them to see their city, the wonderful city of Jerusalem, destroyed. And there they were, just a few Jews now. But the people who were in charge of all these things said that the Jewish people ought to be represented. So they chose one of their number and said, "You can be the governor of these people." This made the Jews very happy. Happy for a while.

But then something terrible happened. There was a man, whose name I'm not going to give you, who was very jealous of Cedaliah. So he had a plot, and eventually he killed him off. And you can imagine what this assassination did to the small group of Jews who remained.

They began to panic. And they said, "What's going to happen to us now? Our leader has been killed. And furthermore, he stood in good grace with these Chaldeans, who have occupied our nation. And if we kill off our own leader, what will they think of us?" . . . they permitted themselves to believe that it was the end of the world. They couldn't see anything bright on the horizon. So they came up with the bright idea, "We'll run away from here. We'll go down into Egypt. And if we go down into Egypt, the grass will be greener, the air will be fresher, the sky will be bluer, and life will be better."

...in fact, I'll read their word for it -- you can find it as the 14th verse of the 42nd chapter of the prophecy of Jeremiah. Said they, when they decided they weren't going to stay any longer where they were, "So, we will go down into the land of Egypt, where we won't see war any more, we won't even hear the sound of the trumpet, we won't be hungry for bread -- that's the place to go."

Then they happened to remember that they were Jewish people. And because they were Jewish people they were God's Chosen People, and they knew very well that they couldn't keep God out of the picture. So this is what they did. They went to God's man, God's spokesman, Jeremiah by name, and they said, "Jeremiah, you have an in with God. Now this is what we want you to do. You go and talk to God about our miserable situation here -- it's intolerable -- and tell Him that we're not satisfied here any longer, that we've made up our minds that we're going to run away, we're going to get ourselves down to Egypt . . . because there the grass

is going to be greener, the sky is going to be bluer, the air is going to be fresher, life's going to be better. Now it's going to be to our advantage if God will say 'Okay.' So, Jeremiah, you tell God that this is what we're planning to do."

Well now Jeremiah was a man of some integrity, and he knew very well that you just don't handle God that way. But after all, he did have a responsibility to these people, and he had a responsibility to himself. So off he went, and gave himself to prayerful meditation....not just an hour, not just a day - - but a whole week-and-a-half. And after ten days Jeremiah came back and gave them God's answer. And they had the surprise of their life as he called them together and he said, "God says, don't go. God says, stay here! God says, stay here where you are and I will help you."

But they said, "We've made up our minds and even though God says we should stay, we're going to leave." And they prevailed upon Jeremiah to go with them. After all, they were the only people he had, and he was the only representative that they had. So they settled for that and together they went down into Egypt.

But lo and behold, when they were in Egypt for a while, what did they find out? - -

- - they found out that the sky wasn't bluer
- - and the grass wasn't greener
- - and the air wasn't fresher
- - and life wasn't better.

Now I want to talk to you this morning a little bit about what I'm pleased to refer to as "The Egypt Myth" - - the myth by which we permit our-

selves to think that if only we could run away from what seems to us an intolerable situation, that everything would be a lot better. Now I'm realistic enough to know that any sermon that's being preached can be effective or ineffective according to the mind and the mood and the manner of the listener. So I must say to you quite honestly, if you are the kind of person who on occasion, or even now, has wished to God that he were someone else.....or he were somewhere else.....

.....or, let me spell it out for you this way -- if you're the kind of a person who on occasion, or even now, wishes he had married another woman, and permits himself to believe that his situation would be far better than it is now --

-- let me come down in this direction -- if perchance you're the kind of person who thinks your home life would be far happier if your kids were different --
-- if you're the kind of person who honestly believes that if only he were working somewhere else, surrounded by other people, that everything would be far better....

....then, my friend, this sermon is for you.

And if this has never been your situation, if you've never been inclined to think this way, then go ahead and throw your mind in neutral, because chances are you're not going to find this sermon helpful.

But then why do I preach it? For the simple reason that these three decades in the ministry have taught me that there are any number of people who are absolutely crippled in their present situation because they brand it absolutely intolerable. They are obsessed with the notion -- if only

they were either someone else or somewhere else, then life would be tolerable and most certainly would be better.

Now I must say to you in all honesty that there are times when the situation ought to be changed. And maybe there are times when a person ought to move. But if a man is going to move simply because he finds his present situation intolerable and permits himself to believe that there are no perplexing people anywhere else, and allows himself the luxury of thinking that somewhere else the bit of heaven becomes instantaneous - - - well this sermon is for you.

Life means people. And as long as we live we're going to be surrounded by people. You can't run away from people. And you can't run away from the problems that life brings. You will be patient with me, won't you, when I tell you a story that maybe all of you know, but it's the kind of story that we need to hear again and again.....the old chap, seated on the rocking chair on the front porch of the country store in the hills down south, was rocking away happily when he saw coming down the country road a man, his wife and their children, and all their earthly belongings, piled high upon the horse-drawn wagon. And as they got near to the porch of the country store they saw the old chap there sitting away, rocking merrily, and they said to him, "What kind of people live in this town of yours?"

....and the old codger, as you know, answered very wisely,

"Well, tell me, what kind of people lived in the town that you left? - - you'll find the same kind of people here."

There's always the temptation to run....but the grass is not greener, and the sky is not bluer.....and sometimes for this school of the discipline of our character God says, "Stay where you are."

But God never gives a directive like that without giving some assurance that He'll help you through the situation. For what is the chief thing about life, anyway, except to develop character, and to bring to bear in your situation where you may be God-like qualities.

Now that leads me to tell you two things:

One, You may do well to accept the fact that you happen to be where you are. You are not anywhere else. Accept the fact that you happen to be the person that you are. In this particular point in time you are't anybody else. And then realistically appraise the situation and ask yourself, what right have I to believe that if I were extricated from this, that I would not have similar problems elsewhere. Now that's the way one must read the present situation.

Then the second thing is this: Be fortified by the blessed thought that you have an ally in God. God says, "I will help you." God says, "I am mindful of your situation." I don't know what your concept of God is really. I know what I hope that it is. I know the kind of concept that I have been trying to indicate to you from this pulpit for the last seventeen-and-a-half years. And if of necessity I must remind you of it, let me tell you what it is:

-- it is the concept of a God who has a continuing interest in each one of us

-- a God who is mindful of us and of our problem -- a God who identifies Himself with our predicament . . .

-- He is the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "I will never leave you....I won't forsake you."

...the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ -- remember Him? -- why do you love Him as you do? Why are you willing to accept His saviourhood? For the simple reason that again and

again you remind yourself of His humanity. He did live here. He was exposed to life. And don't ever forget that great moment when on bended knee in the Garden of Gethsemane -- go ahead and read it this way: "God, can't it be different than it is?" That's what He is saying when He says, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me"...and if that isn't saying, "It would be a lot easier for me if I weren't here!" But then the answer comes: "Your will is to be done." And God's will is to be done through you where you are.

And then my soul knows a measure of delight. When this same Jesus Christ had finished His earthly pilgrimage, just as He was finishing it, He called together a group of His friends. Now, don't forget, you and I can have the blessed assurance that we're numbered among His friends. And as He spoke to them He speaks to us, and He said, "I'm going away, but I want to tell you something. The Comforter is going to come."

Now what in the world is a Comforter? Well, if you remember your Latin, it means one who strengthens us, makes us strong, enables us to stand up to life. So Jesus Christ said, "After I'm gone and you are bereft, and you may feel as though you have come to the end of the world, remember, the Holy Comforter is always available -- to enable you, to empower you and to strengthen you."

So when you're tempted to run, my friend -- and who among us has not been tempted to run on occasion? -- where can you go where you won't find people? And who wants to live in a world where there won't be a challenge?

"Stay," says God, "And I'll help you."

I can't speak for you in your situation. But I can speak for them as a matter of historical record: They made the mistake of their lives by running away.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD IS LIKE AN OLD MAN RUNNING"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

He knew that they meant well, of course, but he found little comfort in what they said to him. They would come to him and say,

"You'll get over it."

But the old man never did. The ache in his heart remained.

The days weren't too bad...he was kept busy with his chores, you see. There was always something to do. But the nights were fairly intolerable. And I presume that night after night there was always the same ritual: he sat down to eat his meal, never perhaps finishing it completely....and then once it was finished he'd go out and do the same thing that he'd done night after night after night after night before -- he'd stand there on the threshold and he'd look down the lane, and he'd look as far as he could, hoping that he might discern even some speck in the distance, that the nearer it would become it might remind him of his returning son.

Well one night it did happen. He stayed there....he looked....now there was no question about it -- it was he! Spontaneously he ran.

There are some things that can't be done gracefully. One of them is an old man running. An old man running always runs awkwardly. But he ran nonetheless. And as he ran, he embraced him, he kissed him.

Who was he? You know full well who he was. He was the younger of his two sons, who some years before had broken his heart. He had come to the

old man and said, "I know that when you die, according to custom I'll come in for a share of the estate. I know you're an honorable man, I know you won't deny it to me, but I want it now. I can't stand it here any longer. I'm fed up with it. I'm restless. Give me what belongs to me."

...and that's exactly what the old man did. He took what one day would be his and gave it to him.

Now we have no reason to believe that the old man lectured him. It wouldn't do any good at that point....and we have no reason to believe that the old man said, to him, "Now get going, and go! and never come back again!"

...he might have been tempted to say that, but he didn't.

For the old man might have known that perhaps there's something to be said for a young man who wants to try it on his own. There is a world out there that's waiting, you see, and there are some who just can't stay put. You see, I can say this to you on good authority, for it was the grandfather of the Assistant Pastor of this congregation who at the turn of the century, at the age of 18, turned his back upon his home, spent two-and-a-half months on a steamer until he came to the brave new world, found his way here. There was something down deep in his soul that made him respond to a world to which he had to go.

There's something to be said for those who want to get beyond where they are. And there's something to be said for old men who allow them to go, realizing that there are certain lessons that they may have to learn for themselves. To learn those lessons they may have to go beyond the confines of their present existence. So with considerable risk on his part, yet willing to take it, to allow it, the old man let the son go.

But the sad thing is this, you see, if we read between the lines -- he never heard from that son in the far country. He never so much as sent back

and said, "Dad, thanks for your prayers -- I can feel them?"

...he never so much as sent back and said,

"Dad, things are going well"

...and in that far country he forgot what he had been taught. He committed all the sins in the book, and he wasted his living, he squandered it, that's the worst part of it, you see. But the better part of it is this, that one day he realized what he was doing to himself, and what had happened to him. He realized his miserable plight. How sensitive he was to spiritual values, that I can't tell. But I do know that he recognized the fact that he was reduced to practically nothing. But then it occurred to him that he'd better get back home. Now that's what prompted him to come back -- the realization that maybe even those pigs were eating better than he was.

Now when the old man sees him, the blush in the cheeks has disappeared. If the old man wanted to say it he could have said to his son, "You look older than I am, your body is broken, and I know that you're diseased. You're not much good to me now. Why didn't you stay where you were?"

...but the

old man didn't talk like that....

....and the old man didn't say to him, "Why didn't you write? Why didn't you let me know where you were?"

...the old

man didn't talk like that.....

All that the old man did was this: "Come on! You belong home!" And would you believe it, the old man helped him all the way home.

Now you recognize this from the Gospel for the Day....it's a story that Jesus Christ told. And one of the precious things that comes to us as Chris-

tians is the fact that we know what God is like. Because that's what Jesus Christ was doing all the time in every relationship that He had with people, He was trying to make clear to them an unforgettable image of God. In the three years of His ministry He did a great deal of preaching and time and time again He'd make His preaching so vivid by telling people stories...

...and incidentally, why don't you tonight, before the sun sets, read for yourself the entire 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It's a series of stories that Jesus told in which He was trying to reveal to people what God is really like....

You know, I'm convinced -- how it may be with you I don't know, but I'm convinced for myself, that for the greater part the problem of people isn't: Is there a God? The problem for many people is: What is God like?

Now we know what God is like, because Jesus told us. In fact, one day one of the disciples came to Him and gave Him to understand that they'd have no problem whatsoever if only they knew what God was like, and they said, "Show Him tous - - what's He really like?" And then Jesus did what no one else was ever able to do, nor has done since: Jesus said to him, "Take a look at me. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." The Apostle Paul in one of his writings puts it beautifully when he says, "In Jesus Christ all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell."

...now in this, another story that Jesus told, we're told what God is like. He's like, if you please, an old man running, running to welcome home a wastrel, wayward prodigal son, diseased and destitute. For it's the nature of love not to condemn, but to help.

My friend, with all the ardor of my soul I preach this sermon to you,

because I know very well that down deep inside each of us something of the prodigal son remains. Who among us is not student of human nature enough to know that inside each man there is at some time or another the temptation to go far on the wrong road. And in the sight of God many of us have spent our moments, if not days, in the 'far country.' And in the end the best that we have to offer God isn't very much. For we are wastrels. We do squander -- if not on somebody else, then on ourselves. And God in the end has to deal with only the left-overs that we bring to Him. And that's precisely what happened in the return of the son -- he brought back only the left-overs of a life that was miserably spent.

None of us ever offers to God the fine, good quality that He deserves. I say this to you again with all the ardor of my soul because I do believe that there are those who come to their senses in the far country, and while you and I may lament the fact that they come to their senses all too late, the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ says that as far as God's concerned, it's never too late.

Now let me make this sermon as practical as I can for you. Some day, somewhere, you may encounter somebody who's turned about, and figuratively speaking, is heading back home. As Christians you and I are in duty bound, by the name of the God we love and we serve, to make it easier for them to get back home, and not more difficult. The precious truth in this story that Jesus told lies in the fact that the old man made it easier for him to get on the way home. He gave him the necessary encouragement for that final lap. And you and I may not realize it, but it's not always the difficult thing to take the first step....the difficult thing may be to stay with it until the final step is taken. God may need us at either place, to give the encouragement to a person to turn around....and God most certainly

needs us when the final step is to be taken.

Because you are as good as you are, my friend, you may find it very difficult to appreciate the fact that it's not as easy for some other people to be as good as you are. Yet God has so made us in His likeness and in His image that we were never meant for Hell. When a man comes to his senses, and there's a turn-about-face, by the grace of God make it easier for him to become re-established, completely re-oriented. It could be that in the plan of God's life, you are the person to stand between that person and the very open gate to eternal life.

I know that what I'm saying to you is not always read as a proper reading of life. There are those who are cynical. But I root and ground what I say to you according to the Scriptures. Now let me tell you what I read one time about a novel that has an intriguing title -- (or course you'll want to pick it up) -- "The Secret Woman." You're right, it deals with a triangle....one man, two women.....married to one, and the other with whom he had an affair. You can fill in the pages now for yourself.

...now we come to the final chapter. According to the author, there comes a terrible blizzard one night, and the two of them are left alone in the house. They are given to deep thought. He's standing by the window....the storm is raging on the outside. She's moved to say to him that she feels she ought to forgive him, that she could never quite understand why he did what he did, but she'd like to forgive him. But he's standing there by the window, you see, and the raging storm on the outside keeps him from hearing anything that she's saying....standing there as he is, he has deep thoughts. Then it occurs to him that he might not know what the morning will bring, so he'd better go out to the

well and bring in a bucket of water. She's infuriated that he walks away. After a moment or two she goes out after him. She can see as he's standing there by the well that his lips are moving, and he's mumbling something...but she doesn't see the tears streaking down his cheeks, because he's trying to figure out to himself how he can say to her that he does want to begin all over again, that he'd like to have a relationship reconciled...but she thinks he's mumbling to himself, and it always bothered her when he mumbled. So she hauls off and bops him one. He loses his balance and falls to his death inside the well....

There are some people who tell us that that's the way life is -- that we're never given a chance to begin over again, that there is always some obstacle. God, according to the story that's told by Jesus Christ, says there's always a chance. It may be late, but with God it's never too late.

Remember that the next time you see someone who is out there in the 'far country.' He may be turning around. Remember it the next time you see somebody whose past you can't forget. He may be reaching out for a future. For in the sight of God every saint has his past.....and every sinner a future.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

August 26, 1973

"THE FRUIT TREES MUST REMAIN"

THE WORLD, O GOD, is too much with us.
We have too little time to do this
sort of thing, to give a measure of
undivided attention to Your Word.
That we may make the most of it, we
ask now that Your Holy Spirit may
lay hold upon us. Amen.

Sept 20:19

I'm quite certain that if you were to ask the Assistant Pastor, who directed our Saint Luke Week at camp, "What is your objective?" -- aside from telling you that his objective is to provide them with Christian fellowship, his objective is to see that they are guided in the way of Christ in every relationship that they have at camp....he would also say, from a practical standpoint, "to see that their time is happily and profitably occupied."

Now it takes a bit of doing to see that that happens for more than a hundred youngsters who have come to a different campsite. So there is a schedule, you see, from the time that the rising bell has rung until the last word is given at night, as a kind of 'Taps' and they go off to sleep.

The mornings aren't too bad, you see . . .

...there is Bible Study -- that's a classroom activity

...there's a nature trail hike -- that keeps them busily
engaged...

The afternoon -- naturally there are interest groups and
crafts take their time spent happily, profitably....

But then after dinner, I suppose in any case of scheduling, this is the acid test: How can you keep them from getting homesick? How can you

keep them from tearing the camp apart? What can you do for them -- happily, profitably?

Well, there was a committee that was responsible for "Night's Doings" -- that's the way it was done. And I remember one night in particular when a movie was scheduled. It did hold their attention. It was delightful entertainment. It was a British-produced film of a few years back, "The Mouse That Roared."

Now some of you may recall it, you remember specifically how the American general who's taken captive by this tiny force of arrow-shooting army keeps saying that he wants his rights protected according to the Geneva Convention. It's rather ridiculous, of course, to see this American general strutting around with these arrow-shooting army alongside of him, maintaining that he has to be protected. And he's almost willing to settle for anything provided it's a regular-size tin dinner plate off of which he could eat his meals.

I presume that if one were to make a study of the warfare of mankind he might be appalled at the way the issue is always given for complete annihilation, to vanquish your enemy. And yet every now and then the attempt to make sure that a human being was treated as a human being, even though he was acting like an animal, with a desire to vanquish the foe.

I have no intention of reading these volumes of the history of warfare down through the ages. I have no way of relishing it at all. And I'm caught up a bit short sometimes even when I read the Bible, for when I began to read it all over again, cover to cover, I was surprised -- of course I had known it but I had forgotten it -- how those were blood-and-thunder days in the Old Testament, and how even God gave the directive that the objective of war was victory, and that the enemy should be vanquished...they should utterly

destroy them. God told the Children of Israel to get in there and to fight like that! And would you believe me when I tell you that it's also to be found in Sacred Writ that God gives them to understand that when they've done their worst, if necessary He'll come in the end. And if some of the enemy have gone into hiding and they can't find them, then the God of Israel says, "I'll release some hornets and they'll seek them out and sting them to death and finish them off."those were blood-and-thunder days.

But I do not forget that when I read the Bible I'm also reading the Bible that deals with God as God is. And God is never less than God. At that particular time in Israel's history they had to keep themselves clean of the enemy, they had to make certain that the enemy did not overcome them, lest they lose what God had said they were designed to give to the rest of the world -- their culture, their monotheism, and belief in the one true God. And even when God said, "You can overcome their cities, you can sack and destroy them, but when it's all over, even after you take the booty of the prey and the people captive, don't let your sons marry their daughters -- don't have a thing to do with them politically -- make no alliance with them.....and whatever you do, don't make any relationship with them as far as religion is concerned! You cannot afford it."

.....that's the way God spoke to them.

But the Bible is always the Bible that leads us to the truth of God. And God is essentially the God of grace. And it's a gratifying thing to discover, even back in these blood-and-thunder days, that the emergence of God's grace is seen evident. As an example: God said to them, Take their cities, sack and destroy them. But there is one thing that you dare not do ---

...now let me read the text for you -- it's the 19th verse
of the 20th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy:

"You shall not destroy their trees by
wielding an axe against them."

Now that wasn't an easy thing for them to take, because they remembered how when the Syrians descended upon them, and they were trying to defend themselves within whatever fortification they were able to establish, the Syrian horde came and laid everything waste. They cut down their trees and burned them and destroyed them. They had nothing. And you can imagine their reaction: when they had their day, they would react in kind, and they wouldn't even so much as allow the stump of an olive tree to remain within miles....that's the way they said to one another, and talked to one another. But then God's spokesman, Moses, came to them and said, "O no you don't! The Lord God of Israel says you may destroy their cities, you may take them captive -- but you do not cut down the fruit trees."

Now let me tell you a little bit about those trees in those days. They were planted, orchard after orchard, grove after grove, so that the needs of posterity might be met. You can see olive trees in the land of Palestine to this very day that are hundreds upon hundreds of years old, and the needs of men have been satisfied by those trees. Sometimes the trees were planted by an oasis, and when men came to those trees by the oasis -- any man, no matter who he was, was treated equally -- any man was free to pluck the fruit of the trees and to eat, and to be strengthened. The law of the desert and the custom of that day was this: that the trees by an oasis would provide a kind of security and sanctuary. The enemy could not be killed by the pursuer when he was found beneath the shadow of a fruit tree, particularly by an oasis.

So, the rules had been set down. So the trees were highly regarded. God said, "Sack and destroy the cities -- but the fruit trees, don't you dare

touch!"

...for you can read between the lines, can't you? When we have done our worst to one another, when we have killed one another off, God's design is that the human race should continue, God's plan for us is that we should be preserved....that we shall be preserved only by those things that nurture us, only by those things that sustain us, only by the things without which a man could not live. So God speaks to the Children of Israel and says, "You don't cut down fruit trees -- trees meant to bear fruit by which you shall be sustained. This is a law that applies even for your enemy. For even an enemy is entitled to live once he's been conquered."

I am reasonably certain that you may react as I have been inclined to react in recent times, that we ~~are~~ a people, a generation who sometimes forget to act rationally. We panic and become bewildered and become confused. Just as those ancient Israelites, hell-bent for victory and drunk with their power and their might could act recklessly -- so much so that unwittingly they could give themselves to doing those things that could destroy their own perpetuation.....so I submit to you, in our day, we must take heed lest we lose our sense of balance, lest we do not respond rationally, lest we destroy our own future.

Now of all the things that I could say to you at this point, I'm inclined to put down the full weight of this sermon by saying to you, with all the strength that my soul commands, our generation, our day in history is a day that's as inclined to act recklessly, never more so than perhaps in our world of spiritual and moral values. With complete abandon we've raised a whole generation of people that can be characterized as those who say, "We shall not pay heed to them" -- blind to the value that they may have to them the day after tomorrow, a decade after the next decade. We have a generation on our hands that's prone on taking down fences, that doesn't

know the meaning of the word 'verboden' - - that there are some things that cannot be trespassed.

It's always a dangerous thing for a man to take down a fence without first discovering why it was put there originally. So I suggest to you that God in His wisdom has laid down certain laws and rules and regulations, from the very beginning God made us to respond and to react morally. God made us to operate best on an ethical basis. God made us to live by the law of holy love, a love that recognizes its origin in the mind and purpose of God himself.

So to you, and to myself, I say, while we are bent on responding and reacting recklessly in our day, losing a sense of reason, the echoing voice of God comes down the corridors of time with the mandate:

"Don't destroy that by which you will be
nurtured - - - don't destroy that by which
you can be sustained - - -

- - - don't take down
fences until you first figure out why
they were put there."

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO BE CONTENT"

- - based on Philippians 4:11

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

Some people are committed to the notion that growing boys ought to have a dog. Your Parsonage Family has had some friends who honestly believe this, and that's why when we first came to you some years back, one of the things we brought down with us from Pennsylvania was a cross between a terrier and a chihuahua who found his place in our family. And happily so for some time, until the sad news came to us that he had been killed in the rapidly moving traffic on Colesville Road.

Another set of friends believed that psychologically it would be a good thing if for Jon's sake -- Jon's the younger of our two sons, who had been especially aggrieved by the loss of this dog -- that psychologically it would be a good thing if the dog could be replaced at once. So out of the goodness of their heart they gave us this time a French poodle with quite a pedigree. We were told that the original owners had named him, from the French -- Mautry -- which you'll readily recognize means love. Happily we said to ourselves, he'll be a friendly dog.

He was. At times. As an example, had you come to visit us at 9219 Manchester Road, and once the initial barking spell was over, and then you had been seated, he might come and very gently brush your leg and show himself with some degree of affection.....and then as your attention was being diverted, that by your feet, or by the chair, placed on the floor,

you had put your handbag....and in the top of your handbag, as happened occasionally, you were one of those who put your sunglasses there....

...now Maury had a peculiar fascination toward plastic frames of sunglasses. He'd reach for them take them, go underneath the dining room table....and there he would defy you to retrieve them. And if you approached him he would snarl.....

Oh, I could recite one episode after another to prove to you that at certain times he was friendly.....but other times very unfriendly. So much so that eventually we had to have done with him because we could not afford to have around the Parsonage a dog with an uncertain temper.

Now, my friend, there are people who say life is like a dog with an uncertain temper. If you ask them to give you a reading of life they may tell you that life is like Maury, our French poodle. You could never quite be certain as to his demeanor - - that sometimes life may deal graciously with you, and other times, and unpredictably so, life could deal out to you the ugly, the unkind and the unfortunate.

What do you make of life, my friend? This sermon basically deals with a philosophy of life. And by this time, whatever your age may be, you probably have some kind of a philosophy. Are you willing to settle for the fact that life could be like a dog with an uncertain temper? Or will you listen to me now when I announce to you the text for this sermon -- a text that comes straight from the heart of a man who had been battered and bruised by life, frequently defeated. He was a tent-mender who became a preacher. And sometime if you want some mighty interesting reading, turn to one of the letters that he wrote to a group of Christians in which he recites for them

the way life had dealt with him -- the enemies that he had made -- the people who didn't trust him -- the people who were out to kill him -- the way he had to devise a strategy to escape for his very life....

....that's the way life had dealt with him.

And yet, mark you, one day he sat down and wrote to a bunch of Christians and said:

"I have learned in whatsoever state I am
therewith to be content."

Now I think I read you correctly, and I know your immediate reaction. It's a measure of unbelief. You say this is unreal, that any man who was treated as, Preacher, you say he was treated, would come to the conclusion of an admission such as this: "Come wind or weather, I'll be content."

-- how do you get like that?

-- how can you allow yourself to respond to life in a
friendly way?

-- how can you always be friends with life? (that's quite a
figure of speech, isn't it? -- to make friends of life)

I'll tell you what prompts it.

A Chinese woman, some years back, I am told, came to the States. It was her first introduction to Western life. When she returned to China she met an American who prevailed upon her to give her impressions. And she said, "I will. What you Americans need more than anything else to do is to learn how to become friends with life. So many, it seemed to me," said she, "are always fighting life, responding defiantly, afraid that life was out to get you, cripple you, defeat you, frustrate you, thwart you."

....and then with the serenity that becomes the East,
she suggested, "Why don't you take a page from our

book? The storms of life prevail against us, too. But like as not, when we're bewildered and confused, you may find one of us just going off into a corner somewhere, or sitting under a tree, and just meditating....looking up at the blue of the sky, thinking of a bird on the wing, the leaf of a tree, and the branch....and also thinking, deliberately, of some good thing that did happen -- of some stroke of wonderful fortune that did come their way. And that helps us to retain our sanity, then, and sense of balance -- to keep our friendship with life."

For the Apostle Paul this was possible -- he had this inner measure of peace that enabled him, come wind or weather, to say what he did.

Now I suggest to you that this verse of Scripture needs to be read carefully and properly. As an example: said the Apostle Paul: "I have learned -- " This was the lesson that he mastered. He did not fall upon it casually. It wasn't a philosophy that just came to him. But out of the crucible of experience, out of the living of his years, this is the lesson that he had deliberately learned.

Now for the moment I want to put down the full weight of this sermon at this point. What have you learned lately? I think a correct reading of life is that life was meant to be a learning experience. If we were to probe down deep within ourselves we might discover that some of us haven't learned much lately at all! I'm convinced in my own mind that this is why, one reason why some people shy away from new situations, shy away from meeting new people -- because they can't afford the luxury of learning the

new thing that might come out of this experience. What is each day but a gift of a new thing from the hand of God? -- a new chance to learn -- a new chance to remember something that you were taught before. The full test of maturity may lie in our willingness to go on learning until the very day that we die! -- or to go on remembering some precious truth that we discovered at some earlier period.

So I put the question to you with all the strength of my soul: What have you been learning lately, about yourself? Down deep within the recesses of your mind there could be vast territories that remain to be explored. What have you learned lately about your wife?...your son?...your daughter? What have you learned lately about Jesus Christ?

It's a shameful thing that so often we linger with the images that are the result of pre-conceived notions. There's no question about it, the Apostle Paul had his moments when he could have said life isn't worth the effort. He could have been every bit as cynical as the chap not so long ago who was asked to name the happiest and unhappiest days of his life... cynically he replied, "The unhappiest day of my life was the day when I was born....the happiest will be when I die." He had never learned the lesson of life in God's eyes, that there's more in the profit side of the ledger than in the debit. Says the Apostle Paul when he thought of life, "This is what I have learned -- that come wind or weather, in whatsoever state, to be content."

Now for heaven's sake, read that text carefully and properly, and there's no implication to be allowed that the man who said those words was happy with the fact that life had dealt him the ugly blow, the unkind and the unfortunate blow. That's not the way you read this text. What he's

really saying is that in the face of the untoward circumstance, I have remained content -- in the face of it, despite it.

Now how do you get that way?

Well here again, it depends, my friend, as to what your concept of God may be, and eventually to say it all hinges on this:

-- if you can believe that God is good....

-- if you can believe that God is still in control of
His universe.....

-- if you can believe that the eternal is never less than
goodness and love and truth....

-- if you believe that God himself cannot be thwarted,
that His purposes will be achieved....

....then you can allow yourself this measure of completeness and fulfillment in the face of the seemingly devastating storm that rages against you.

Now let me give you an example of what I mean. A book that ~~some~~ day I want to read in its entirety is a book that was written by the man who led the expedition, not too long ago, on the ascent of Everest, a man who was since knighted by the British Empire. He relates how day after day on the ascent of Everest they had to face the rigorous storms -- they were inescapable. Do you suppose that for a single moment....do you suppose for a single moment they were happy in the thought that they were never quite certain whether they would make the next step upward because of the force arrayed against them? Of course they were not happy with these obstacles. But in the face of them they remained content because they kept their eye on the objective.

Now what's God's objective for your life? God's objective is that we

might know Him, and the saving grace of Jesus Christ. And you and I must remember that come wind or weather, the objective of God is still to be achieved, and we'll allow ourselves to believe that it will be achieved. Then, you see, this can permit a man to live by the philosophy that no matter what the circumstances may be, there is this inner peace that can prevail. If you go back and check it out in the Greek, it really means 'self-fulfillment' - - 'self-completeness'....in the face of the untoward, the unfortunate and the unfriendly.

You may find this difficult to believe, my friend, honestly....and maybe you can't subscribe to it. I only know that there are those who have, and out of the validity of their own experience they tell us it's possible. And they're the radiant ones.

Now if it's a final measure of encouragement you need, let me give this to you as the last sentence of the sermon:

- - some people have told us that

When the night is darkest,

The road longest,

And the battle fiercest....

God is nearest.

This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IN A WISE PASSIVENESS"

(based on Matthew 6:6)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

A writer on economics has written that what this country needs most today is cheap atomic power, weather control, power without wires, low cost fabrics and mass production of houses.....that's what was being said and that's what was being believed a quarter of a century ago when these lines were written.

Now twenty-five years have come and gone. What is the manner, what is the stance, what is the shape of our country today? -- twenty-five years after a writer on economics said that what we needed most:

-- cheap atomic power....controled weather...power without
wires....low-cost fabrics...and mass production of houses.

Would you care to assess the mood, the manner of our country today? No matter where the search for these things may have taken us, this is the kind of a country we have on our hands now -- a country that is peopled by folks who are fear-ridden, who are frustrated, who are insecure, who are not fully satisfied. This is a kind of people we are. Wittingly or unwittingly we are forced to admit, at least when the sober thinker gets our attention, that we are not saved by things. And the answer to our basic need is not gadgetry. The new day has not loomed upon the horizon thanks to technocracy. For we are still a people unsatisfied and dissatisfied, fear-ridden and frustrated. We who have tried to reach out have come back

with only emptiness -- no matter how we may have surrounded us by better things.

What's wrong?

With your quickened Christian conscience you can supply the answer, of course you can. In an attempt to satisfy ourselves with things we have lost contact with spiritual resources. We haven't made contact with God. We haven't reached out for God. We've reached out for things -- this is the judgment that has to be made. And I dare say when you have your more realistic evaluation of life, you may come to that conclusion...

...so what we need is not weather control --

but a better control of ourselves

...what we need is not so much power without wires --

as we need to be able to harness the spiritual
energy of life

...what we need may be not so much low-cost fabrics

by which to clothe ourselves -- as we need to
discover that there is such a thing as the
garment of righteousness

When we think in terms of exploring territory by which we can better satisfy our physical needs, we have to remind ourselves that there is the vast unexplored territory of the human heart. We may fill our houses with many things, but our minds and our hearts may be empty. There is a vacuum, there is a void. And it represents the absence of God.

Now as I come to this sacred desk this morning, I am tremendously concerned with the fact that we're not reaching out after God, or we're

not allowing God to reach out after us. How is this possible? Many of you may come and say, "We'd like to become more God-conscious -- we'd like to be impressed by the reality of the fact of God. But how does this occur? If God is everywhere, if there's no place where God cannot be found, why do I miss Him? If what we need most is the eternal dimension, if what we need is to be possessed by the God-factor, why doesn't it happen?

On Friday morning of this past week I received a call, early in the morning I should add quickly, the voice at the other end of the wire was a former member of this parish now living in New England. He wanted to know if he couldn't make a special trip to re-establish a relationship with Saint Luke all over again, and to talk with some of us.

I learned very quickly in that early morning conversation that while he is still in his early 30's, he's having it made. He's established quite a name for himself in the legal profession...three secretaries...two students reading law under him....a lovely home surrounded by acre after acre of that rolling New England countryside....a couple of cars...a good woman, devoted wife and mate.....family. You know honestly what the upshot of that whole contact that was made then, and as we talked late into Friday night after he landed at Friendship, and then yesterday morning and last night before he went back to New England? How can I be sure that I am responding to God? The question, of course, that he's wrestling with now, is, even when he's thinking in terms of the ministry: what can he do for God in the ministry that he cannot already do in the profession that already claims him?

Every now and then you can stop and check, there are people who are being made aware of the fact that in this world of gadgetry they are not satisfied -- the hunger after something over and beyond these things remains, and I cannot begin to tell you how I cherish the realization in my own life,

when before I'd even reached mid-point I sat down to assess what life meant to me, and happily I could conclude that I was caught up in something called religion -- the Christian religion. You remember your Latin, that word religion -- religio, religionis -- to be tied to, to be bound by -- what? God.

And for us the God is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Granted the point is being made, then, that what we need most is not things, but this vital relationship with God. Now do we go about it? If God is to be found anywhere, everywhere, why isn't He more real to me? Your question is a good one, and don't be ashamed to raise it.

And I make bold to give you an answer. I'm about to tell you that it just doesn't happen. While God is to be found anywhere and everywhere, it just doesn't follow that you naturally become aware of Him. I'm impressed by the fact that centuries ago there was a carpenter's-son-become-preacher. He turned His back upon the carpenter's shop and became an itinerant one who, no matter where He went, would always introduce the God-factor. Given five minutes with anybody anywhere, so it seems as we read the record today, He always ended up talking about God.

Now the text for this sermon today -- it's the 6th verse of the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, and Jesus is saying to certain people, dealing with this very thought:

"You want God to become real to you?
Enter into your chamber, and shut
the door . . . "

Those are both verbs of action -- you enter -- you shut the door -- you do something. Now if our Blessed Lord could offer this word of counsel in a day and age as pastoral as that, think how much more urgently the advice is needed now.

Well, let me go back to what I said to you earlier: if you are to be encountered by God, it just doesn't happen. God who is always making overtures toward us, can't do much with us until we take the effort to make the contact, until we decide, if you please, to hook on to Him, He who is reaching out toward us.

Let me give you a homespun illustration, if you don't mind. By this time any of you who have listened to the preaching from this pulpit have found occasional reference to that little rendezvous of ours, back there amid the hills of home, that quiet place nestled in the shadow of the hills. Well, in order to serve the purpose which we had in mind, we've tried to keep it as close to nature as possible. We did make the concession, of course, for electricity, and running water. For twenty years we got along without a telephone, and then, when Winifred's mother, invalided, was cared for for a while in that place, we did install a telephone. Now, they tell me, the people who are our neighbors want to have television. Up yonder is the hill. They can bounce the signal from that hill by sending a line right down our country lane....it goes right by our house....

...now if we are to avail ourselves of that resource, we've got to make the decision as to whether we hook on or not. It just doesn't come in automatically. The resources is going right down that country lane....

Oh, it would be a happy thought to have it when we need it. Several summers ago, when man first put his footprint upon the surface of the moon, we were up there.....and to witness that we had to gather ourselves up and go go into the city and visit with some friends and view it. There are good

things, you see, that are possible in that resource. But if it is to be made available to us, we have to make the decision to hook on. The effort has to be made. So Jesus Christ said to those who were wondering how they could go about to establishing reality with God, He gave that wonderful suggestion: You enter into a chamber, and you shut the door....And you make yourself quiet.....and then the encounter with God may begin.

Among my peculiarities, if you don't mind my parading them in front of you for the moment, at least one of them -- is a desire to sit quietly when a new day dawns upon us. And occasionally I get out of bed and come downstairs and sit in the chair by the window, and watch God pressing His rheostat, so it would seem, when the darkness is dispelled by the increasing rays of a brand new day. It's really quite an experience....

...and occasionally I do the reverse, then, at day's end, if at all possible -- go some place where I can be quiet and see the darkness descend upon us, and see how God enfolds us with the quiet of the night.....

But in order for this to happen I deliberately must find the time for it. In order for me to benefit from this experience I must be deliberately taking the time to allow the experience to occur. It's quite a thing to see, to appreciate all over again the dawn and the darkness. It's never failed yet. It's there always. But one appreciates it only as he takes time, to be made aware of it, and then to deeply reflect upon the precious thought that this day which now comes and this day which will go will never again return. And one is made aware all over again of the high value to be placed upon the gift of a day.

But there are some people who frankly confess to me that even though they do make time to be alone, they just don't know what to do with the time when they do make time for it. It is pathetic. Some eight years ago or

more we took the entire staff of Saint Luke Church to the Lodge of the Carpenter -- about 45 minutes from here. The Church of the Master has this very wonderful rural retreat. We stayed there overnight, we stayed in the little structure that they called the Inn. It's nothing but a series of individual rooms -- cubicles, if you please, -- four bare walls...a door...a floor and a ceiling...a bed and a stand and a chair. That's all! I think each room is furnished with a Bible. But as part of our program the staff was directed at an early hour in the evening, each one to go to a room especially assigned to him individually, and there he was to stay without any communication with anybody else until the next morning. It was only years later that I learned from a staff member that several of our staff, worthy as they are, just didn't know what to do with this descent of solitude that suddenly was theirs -- how they craved peace and quiet, but then didn't know what to do with it.

I have a suggestion for you. It's one thing to crave it, it's one thing to arrange for it, but then remember that when it occurs you're not simply withdrawing, you're not simply taking yourself away from the world, but by deliberate design you must also usher yourself into the reality of God's presence....which means you've got to start thinking about God -- even less about yourself, even less about your problem, even less about your burden. You can do it -- honestly, it takes a bit of doing, it takes some experience. But the only way you gain experience is to keep doing the thing over and over again, until you find yourself somewhat skilled by it.

As we begin another Fall and Winter in Saint Luke Church, I covet for every one of you, even as I covet for myself, the deliberate attempt on our part to master the fine art of being alone with God. You got it, didn't you? -- not just being alone, but being alone with God. I dare you to endeavor to try to keep sacrosanct at least fifteen minutes out of each day. Begin with a quarter-

of-an-hour, and your only purpose, then, would be to allow God to 'hook on' to you as you give Him a chance! I dare you! if you've never tried it, to try it.

...I warn you, happily, your life will never
again be the same. And the difference will be
the difference which is God. This I most certainly believe....

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

September 16, 1973

"DEO ET PATRIA"

O GOD, We tell you now what we've told
you before, even what you know without
outtelling it. We make so little time
to do the sort of thing that we're go-
ing to do now, to give some measure of
undivided attention to Your truth.
That we should make the most of it,
we'd like very much to be possessed
now by Your Holy Spirit. Through
Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

Psalm 67

The sermon originally planned for today, which is being preached
at 11:15 and was preached at 8:30, will not be preached during this
service, for understandable reasons. For in connection with this serv-
ice, once we have sung the recessional hymn, we will walk as a gathered
people, an entire congregation, out on the church lawn on this side of
the building, and there we are to dedicate a memorial flag pole which
will fly the emblem of our Christian faith, a fit and proper companion
to the pole that has already been dedicated that flies the banner of
our nation.

There is a text for this meditation -- the opening words of Psalm
#67. Many of you will recognize them at once:

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us,
and cause his face to shine upon us,
That thy way may be made known upon the earth,
Thy saving health among all people."
Thy

And if it's a title that you'll be wanting for this meditation, let me
give it to you in the Latin: "Deo Et Patria" -- you recognize it, "God And
Fatherland" - or - "God And Country."

We dare not forget, as it's already been established, that every time

w come together we are citizens of two kingdoms. We are the citizens of this present world, owing allegiance to a particular government, and for practically all of us who are here that government is the government of the United States of America. But Christians also recognize that over and above this they have a loyalty to One to whom we refer, as you've heard it many times, "King above all kings, Lord above all lords, Ruler above all rulers" ...namely the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who holds all the kingdoms of the world in the hollow of His hand, whether they know it or not.

Significantly enough, that on that first Sunday in July when we dedicated the Arthur H. Davis Memorial Flag Pole, my mind went back to the day we had ordered that flag pole. The very day that we had placed the order, a gentleman and his wife who worship frequently with us, who have friends in this parish and who have become our treasured friends, spoke to me in passing, not knowing, of course, of the intention to put up a flag pole, "Would your church care to have a flag pole? -- we'd like to make one possible." Then I told him, of course, that that was the week when we had ordered one.

But then I remembered that some of us had come to the conclusion that very properly there ought to be two flags, and it was our intention at the very beginning that we might settle just for one pole and fly two flags from it. And what you may not know is this: that the Christian flag is the only banner that ever flies above the national emblem when a people have been gathered together for worship. For even our government recognizes the fact that we have a loyalty to One who is above even our own nation...God and country....God and nation. So haply we fell upon the good notion that

we would have two poles, and that the Christian flag would fly not only on the Lord's Day, when we would be gathered together, but every day of the week it would stand out there on Colesville Road as our ensign, as the symbol of our faith. Do I have to establish clearly in the minds of any of you why there should be two? God and country. We must not forget it.

These banners representing our loyalties will be noted. It would be futile to put them there if nobody paid any attention to them. When we were on holiday in Europe this summer one of the letters that I got from a member of our staff was to tell me what happened one day -- within the very first week after the flag was flying, the national flag. The man who hoisted it in place each morning when he came to work inadvertently had the flag flying upside down. Before the correction could be made, there were, so the letter said, at least six telephone calls to the church office giving us the information that the flag was upside-down. I tell you this for the simple reason that people do pay attention to banners that fly, they are not ignored.

And once one is in place, it was only yesterday that another member of the staff said to me that now that we have a pole, he's been surprised to discover how many other places have poles in front of them, how many other flag poles there are. The fact can be established that recognition is given to it.

Now secondly, and with all the strength that I can command at this point, there will be those occasionally who ask: What does that banner mean? If it's too commonplace, perhaps you have to discipline your soul to ask the question. My mind goes back very quickly to the first parish

that I had the privilege of serving, which was during the years of World War II -- that's when I began my ministry. Of the 365 sons and daughters of that congregation who served under colors, at least three of them were at one time missing in action. We offered daily prayer for them every day in the week, seven o'clock in the morning, seven o'clock at night, without fail. And one day of the week we had a special service in which 15 were named before the Throne of Grace, and their families would come for this period of intercession.

I remember one name in particular that appeared on that prayer list:

"missing in action . . "

".....missing in action . . "

".....missing in action . . "

....eventually the records revealed that he was a prisoner of war.

And when he came marching home, he came one day during the week -- he didn't wait for Sunday -- to express his thanks for those who remembered him in prayer. He was a man now, a seasoned chap, not yet 30, but mature. And the tears came down that man's cheeks when he referred to the fact that he could look out from his place of imprisonment and see something that he had not seen for a long, long time.....our liberating forces had arrived, and flying there in front of him his eye fell upon the emblem of our nation. Said he, as he recalled the sight this was the gist of his conversation: "It meant more to me than it's ever meant before." We do well to ask ourselves the questions, when we see these banners, Do I appreciate what they represent?

Now very quickly, a word or two about this emblem that's going to represent our Christian faith, that's going to fly from its standard day after day on busy Colesville Road. Well, as you probably know, the Christian

flag has this blanket of white as a background. And then, up in the corner, a field of blue upon which is superimposed a cross in red.

Let me speak briefly now to each of these colors.

White has always represented purity, holiness....without stain, completeness. The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God who requires His subjects to serve Him with a pure heart. We are human, of course we are. Yet nonetheless when we give our allegiance to Jesus Christ, God's Son sent to be our Saviour, the answer that we give on the day of Confirmation here in Saint Luke Church is, "Yes, with my whole heart." And the God who requires obedience from us is a God who is very exacting. He's also the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob -- the God of the Children of Israel, the God of a chosen people, who one day could say to Him:

'God be merciful unto us, and bless us, as a
people, as a nation . . . '

And this God to whom we turn, is a God who continues to hold us responsible for the allegiance that we give to His rigid requirements. Whenever you look at this flag, remember it's the flag that represents the Christian faith that has roots in Hebraic tradition. Christians do not give up the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are still a part of our faith. When we memorize them and when we try to live by them, God, you must remember, does not give us options. God did not give us, in the Ten Commandments, 'Ten Suggestions.' They were Commandments. And the God whom we love and whom we serve is an exacting God: a pure heart....whole-hearted allegiance.

Blue, of course, as you know, traditionally represents loyalty and devotion. Loyalty and devotion to whom? -- it's already been made implicit

-- to God! -- Creator -- Provider -- Sustainer -- Redeemer. If I read my Scriptures aright, I think the first thing that God exacts from us is that we be loyal to Him, that we try to follow Him. Loyalty to one another....we are caught up in the company of the redeemed. Each of us has strengths and weaknesses. Each of us has a need that another can meet. Each of us has a strength that can be like a benediction to somebody else. And when you think of that color blue, I suggest that you remember that we're meant to be found faithful to one another in the name of God.

One of the elements that we've introduced into the new marriage service here in Saint Luke Church is, when the ring is placed on the finger of the partner: "I give you this ring as a symbol of my love, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you in the name of God." By the same token we who are caught up in the family of believers, with all that we have and all that we are, we ought to honor one another.

There is the cross, in red. When we fly this banner, the symbol of our faith, we are not simply saying that we believe in God as an abstract idea. We are not flying this banner as a people who say we believe in God who is pure spirit. We believe in God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who identifies himself with us. We believe in God for whom we cherish the three-word definition: God is Love -- the highest kind of love, sacrificial love -- -- "for Jesus Christ so loved us that He gave himself for us" . . . a God who suffered and died that we might live.

There was a time when people looked at this sign, this emblem of their faith, and said, "By this sign we conquer." So the emblem will fly-- day after day -- on the lawn of Saint Luke Church. And there will be those

who stop for the traffic light at the busy intersection of Colesville Road and Dale Drive, and haply they'll look, not simply to admire what adds an aesthetic touch, perhaps, but maybe they'll ask the question: What do those flags mean? Maybe they'll ask the question. And when they'll get the answer they'll know precisely why we fly them! * * *

Now you won't forget, will you, that we file out behind the crucifer and the choir, and we'll go to the church lawn, once the recessional hymn has begun, and finished, and there have a very brief service of dedication.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity -- 11:15 -- September 16, 1973

"DAY BY DAY"

(II Corinthians 4:16)

WE'VE TOLD You before, O God, not that you did not already know it -- we have so little time to do the kind of thing we're going to do right now, to give some measure of undivided attention to Your truth. That we should make the most of this opportunity, we now ask You to possess us by Your Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord.
Amen.

The next time you see our mutual friend, John Troxler, just ask him three questions -- go ahead, he won't mind.

Now the first question you should ask him is this: What time do you get up on Sunday morning?and chances are he'll tell you he gets up on Sunday morning at the same hour he gets up every other day of the week.

And then go on to ask him the second question: How many clocks do you have in your home? ...which will lead you to the third question, and that's why the first question is being asked: How long does it take you to wind them?

...for John does his clock-winding on Sunday morning before he comes to church. He's become quite a clock fancier.

And if you were to talk to him about clocks, in all likelihood he'll wax a bit philosophical. He'll tell you, as he's already told me, that some clocks are like people -- they are downright temperamental. He has some clocks that he's worked on, seemingly endlessly -- he thinks that they ought to run with a measure of perfection. But for some unpredictable reason,

even though they have been wound properly, they'll just stop....no reason at all why they should stop.

On the other hand, the greater portion of his clocks, he tells me, run exceptionally well. In fact this morning, as I was getting ready to come down in the procession at the 8:30 service, I encountered him at the church door. He had just come from the main church office where he had wound the clock that hangs on the wall there. And with that gleam in his eye -- "It isn't off a minute in two weeks!" So there are some clocks, you see, and that's typical of them, that are very, very reliable.

But after you've finished your conversation with him you'll discover that somewhere he will inject for you these two thoughts:

...that a clock is just about as good as its spring -- no better
...and that every clock, no matter how well it works, will
eventually wind down.

He had to tell one of our friends one time that that was the trouble with her clock. She thought there was something wrong with it, so she took it to John, and then John had to inform her that it was a 80-hour clock, and if she wanted the clock to run she'd simply have to wind it. It had run down.

Which all of this leads me to say to you that there are some people who say that this world is like a clock that's running down...its energy is being depleted and is not being replenished. Well I'm not here to argue that case so much as I am to submit to you that I am convinced that there are some people whose lives are like clocks. In fact all of us, eventually we, too, wind down, and the power is not being replenished. That's one of the sad things that has to be said about life.

When I was a college student I had the good fortune to live for two

false accusation, I'll restore him four-fold"...as much as to say, "Jesus, if I gypped that man 25 bucks, I'll give him back 100" -- can you imagine a man talking like that! -- the life-changing force, and what was the strategy of Jesus Christ? It wasn't a strategy that was employed by Jesus Christ saying, "Zacchaeus, I know all about your dirty tricks...I know all about your shady deals. I despise you, Zacchaeus, and your kind. And I have connections in Heaven, as you may or may not know, and let me tell you -- as far as I'm concerned, you deserve to go to Hell!"

...did He talk like that? Not at all!

Says Jesus Christ: "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world."

It doesn't take much for a person to tell another person what's wrong with him. Anybody can do that. Anybody can condemn somebody else -- it's the favorite passtime of some people. In this age of electronic gadgetry, I wonder what would happen if tonight you discover that somebody had installed within your clothing, unbeknownst to you, a recording device, and then tonight, when you went to go to bed, when you no longer had conversation with anybody else.....all of your conversations or perhaps your thoughts would be played back for you -- -- you might discover how frequently, when you talked about somebody else or when you thought about somebody else, you were in a condemning mood. Why, I'll never be able to tell you why, it's so easy for us to fault-find, and to condemn, and we're so slow to praise. It's part of our nature.

But I also know that no one is ever won to a better situation by simple, downright condemnation. I am convinced that if a man is to improve his situation he doesn't need anybody else to condemn him. But he needs to find himself in a situation where he condemns himself. And then you can expect some measure of progress.

years with a college dean. His wife had died. Somehow to protect himself against the loneliness that invariably set in, he looked around for somebody who might come in. In dire needs of funds, it was easy for me to say yes, let alone the high regard that I had for him. And I remember on occasion when I would drive him around to some of his speaking engagements (that was also part of the arrangement) -- he, too, would wax philosophical, and he would think of the years that were rapidly approaching for him, and he said something to me that I couldn't appreciate at that time, just barely 20, you know, and he well beyond 60....he simply said, "I hope I never wither on the vine." It made no sense to me then.

...but as a Pastor who ministers to all kinds of people, and now in this day and age with those who are becoming increasingly older and still hanging on -- the descriptive is an apt one: people who continue to live but who are withering on the vine.

Is there any word to be said in anticipation of this, in anticipation of the fact that the day eventually will come, all other things being equal, when as we reach full cycle of our life we are confronted by continued physical deterioration. Does that mean that we'll deteriorate in every way?

There was a man by the name of the Apostle Paul who spoke to this. I can't tell you his exact age when he was moved to think in such terms, but I can tell you that physical deterioration had set in for him, and understandably so. He was that man with so great zeal for the cause of Jesus Christ, and he paid a price for it physically -- not only emotionally and spiritually, but physically as well. He does say in one of his writings that he had a handicap, a "thorn in the flesh" he called it -- that he could never completely rid himself of it. But then, you see, in his travelings all around

Asis Minor he talks about the number of times that he was shipwrecked, which meant exposure to the elements....he tells about the times that he was beaten, whipped, and presumably carried to his grave the mark of the lashes.....a body that was bleeding and broken on more than one occasion. Eventually, you see, deterioration sets in when you've lived that kind of a life.

And that leads me to the text, his words for it: the 16th verse of the 4th chapter of the Second Letter that he wrote to a group of Christians who lived in a town called Corinth....said he, realizing this increasing physical deterioration, said he:

"But we never lose heart; though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day."

There he was, standing in the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. His physical condition was such that he could not conduct. Yet the gifted one, the octogenarian-plus, in a voice scarcely heard, said: "I feel younger now than ever before." Granted his physical energy was being slowly spent, how come there was this spirit which defies the ravages of time? The answer: I tell you it's possible. The word of the Apostle Paul for it.

And the word of a saint of this congregation for it, if you don't mind. Let me use her for the moment as Exhibit A. I called on her in the hospital last weekend. I presume she's in her 80's. She wasn't too happy about going to the hospital because it was going to confirm a notion that she had, that they might not be able to do much about her increasing physical deterioration. When I went to minister to her -- you know what I'm going to say -- she ministered to me! -- ebullient, almost transcendent -- she spoke only of happy things. In the limited time that I spent with her

she spoke only of good things, and shared good thoughts about people ...never so much as a word about the report that the doctor was going to bring that she did not welcome. The body was wasting away but the spirit was absolutely triumphant.

Now how do you get that way?

...don't argue as to whether you can get that way or not -- it is possible! And I have called as witnesses to this desk that man across the centuries, the Apostle Paul.....and a member of this parish who's recently been hospitalized. And if you want to you can have a parade before your own mind, the people that you know whose bodies have wasted away but their spirits are indomitable. How do you get that way? Well it's possible, but you just don't get that way. It takes a bit of doing. And I dare say it takes a bit of doing across the years.

I'm not ruling out the possibility of a miracle. I do believe that for certain people at any age transformation can set in. But I also know full well that seldom if ever, generally speaking, is there such a thing as instantaneous goodness, or at least the kind of goodness that draws heavily upon the benefit of earlier years. I had an old friend who told me that, when I was 40, that the time to get ready for old age was when you're 20. Said the Apostle Paul, 'one is renewed on the inside day by day.'

Well there's the secret for it: it's daily renewal. In order to have this indomitable spirit, in order to still be in rapport with life, and to be grateful for it. And I suppose it all depends very largely upon what your goal and objective in life is. If you simply want to eat and drink and make merry, that's one thing. But if you want to keep yourself in league with the things eternal, if you want to keep yourself in league with the purposes of God -- that's something else.

We talk a great deal about the fruits of the Spirit. But did you ever stop to think, my friend, that fruit is always the result of the process of fruition. That means that somewhere along the line seeds had to be sown. Before you have the fruit you have to have the seed. So now, if you'd like to have the happy prospect of growing old graciously, growing old gracefully, what is more, growing old gladly, despite the deterioration of the flesh, make ready for it now.

The Apostle Paul also said that one should think about certain things -- whatever is beautiful, kind, lovely -- remember how it goes? -- think on these things. It wasn't even a Christian who said this, but we could well afford to take a page from his book -- "We become according to our thoughts." I have told you before, there are some magazines that I just can't afford to allow myself to read....there are some novels, once I discover the direction in which they are moving, that I can't afford to read. There are certain things to which a man ought not to allow himself to become exposed. It was also a wise man who said you might not be able to control the things that happen to you, but it is possible to control your thought regarding them. And that's the way it is with life itself.

For the Christian, each day is a precious gift, won for him and given to him by the grace of God. Look upon each day in that way -- come wind or weather -- look upon yourself as one for whom God gave Christ to die for you. You have been purchased with a price. I have told some of you, I am indebted to a person who saved my life once. And would it be too hard for you to believe if I were to suggest that one reason why I want to go on living is just to prove to that person that his effort, even at the risk of his own life perhaps, was worth making. Did you ever think about it that way between your life and God? If

you should, then you'll know what it is to be renewed in the spirit, then you'll know what that artist meant when he said, unable to conduct, his physical energies wasting away, "I feel younger now than ever before."

So.....we do not lose heart; though our outer nature
is wasting away our inner nature is being renewed
day by day.....

.....this I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HE CAME TO BE OUR FRIEND"
(John 12:47)

THROUGH Jesus Christ, Thy Son
our Lord. Amen.

You'll have to fill in the details for yourself, and I don't think you'll find it a difficult thing to do. I'll simply say it could be an unpleasant situation, a strained or difficult situation that exists between a father and a son....a mother and a daughter....a husband and a wife.....the supervisor or the foreman where you work and another staff member. That's the situation. There is difficulty. Now recognize the fact that all other things being equal, one person may be able to succeed in that situation where another person does not. How do you account for it? Well, maybe this sermon will have the answer.

Now let me begin in this fashion.

His name was Augustine, one of the greatest of all the early Church fathers. If you know anything at all about it, you'll recognize what has been established as fact, that he was the great link between the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther. As the great principles of the Protestant Reformation were expounded, Luther went back again and again and built upon the teachings of Augustine.

Now Augustine was not always a good man. There was a time in his life when he was a veritable rascal....

...you wouldn't want him to date your daughter -- you'd resent the thought that maybe he would ask for her hand in marriage....and if you had a teenager, you surely would never want him to come under his influence.....

He was that kind of man -- a rascal, a scoundrel. Whatever sin that might come to your mind, Augustine had already committed it. And you might not know when he was going to commit it the second time, where, and with whom.

But Augustine did not always stay that way. He was converted. He became a brand new person altogether. Now there were two forces, by the power of God, that were operative.

The Holy Spirit was able to use two people in particular. One was his mother, the blessed Monica. Monica never gave up hope on Augustine. She honestly believed that some day, somehow, by the power of God his life would be changed. And she always prayed that it would happen. And God used Monica's prayers, and they were answered.

But God also used a teacher that Augustine had, and in his "Confessions" Augustine refers to him and gives him credit for a part of his conversion. He said, "I recognize the fact that he loved me, and I loved him in return -- not because of the truth that he was teaching -- long before this I had given up of ever having the Church teach me anything. But I responded to him because he had a high regard for me as a person." Now there's your answer, if you please -- 'He had a high regard for me as a person. . . '

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He spent, as you know, practically all of His time with people. No matter where He went He found them, and as He had opportunity He made conversation with them. As a result, here and there there were people whose lives were changed just because they encountered Him, or He encountered them. How do you account for it? How do you explain the fact that Jesus Christ, more than any other person who has ever lived, introduced the life-changing force? Well, His word for it, if you don't mind, and that serves as the text for today's sermon -- it's

the 47th verse of the 12th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"He came not to change the world,
but to save the world . . ."

When I mention the name of Jesus Christ to you and say to you: Who is He, and what did He come to do?" - you know the answer: "He is my Saviour, and He came to save me." Well now, how did He do it? How did He go about it?

Let me stop for a moment and inject something here, if you don't mind... John Burroughs, bless his soul, took a ~~scolding~~ red hot poker one day, and burned into the wooden mantel above his fireplace these words:

BEFORE THIS FIREPLACE NO EVIL SHALL
BE SPOKEN OF ANY MAN

...how did our Blessed Lord go around saving people? I recommend to you, you know I do frequently, that you read any of the Gospels as though you had never read it before. And when this happens you will be tremendously impressed by the fact that Jesus Christ, who had so great influence on people, seldom if ever condemned them.

Now, mark you, He came to save us --- a bunch of miserable sinners. Now you won't like this at all, and chances are that you'll not be thanking me for telling it to you, but the fact cannot be ignored: 'the Christian life basically is a progressive sense of shame. The more earnestly we endeavor to follow Jesus Christ, the more we discover that we just can't do it as we ought to do it. Honestly now, who thinks that he can stand before Jesus Christ flawlessly? Well, first the bad news: 'if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' Now: the good news: 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.'

Well, that's what we are -- we're all a bunch of sinners. And Jesus Christ came into the world to deliver us, to save us. But in order to save us He does not begin by condemning us. As I read any of the Gospels as

though I were reading them for the first time, I am also impressed by the fact that Jesus Christ spent a great deal of His time with people who were not morally respectable! Now how do you like that for a shocker! And if you didn't quite understand it, let me spell it out for you in this manner. I have a suspicion that if Jesus Christ were to come back today and walk this earth as He did in the days of Judea and Galilee, He wouldn't hang around Saint Luke Church very long. I don't think He would. I think He'd turn His back upon us and go out somewhere where sinners are not nearly as morally respectable as we are.

Now don't get me wrong, we're still sinners. But I think we classify ourselves with some degree of comfort as "Morally respectable." But you can't tear that label "sinner" off completely. But Jesus Christ when He was here on earth didn't spend a great deal of His time hanging around the temple or the synagogue. He was always going out to where the people were who were not morally respectable. And He invested His time and His energy in them. What was His technique? What was His strategy? I dare you to find it out, and to listen to the rest of this sermon to its very conclusion. He came to save us, you know that. But seldom if ever did He condemn anyone. Let's take some people as specific examples.

Take the man who wrote that first Gospel, the Gospel according to Matthew. Do you mean to tell me that Jesus Christ didn't know what kind of a man Matthew was? -- his very occupation indicated the kind of a man he was. He was a tax collector, and in those days tax collectors were downright unscrupulous. You've heard me tell you before -- they had a peculiar arrangement with Rome. Rome said, this is the base, this is the amount of money we expect from your jurisdiction, but all that you get over and beyond this you can pocket for yourself -- you can set the rate! And the people had to pay it.

Well you can imagine what kind of a position, the very position itself would do to a man, open all kinds of doors of temptation to him to exploit. And he did! And Jesus Christ knew this about Matthew -- He heard what people had to say about him. But one day as Jesus Christ was walking down the street, He comes to the very place where Matthew is.....Jesus Christ who knows all about him. And what do you suppose Jesus Christ says? - -

- - does He say to him, "You scoundrel you! You despicable one! How can you do this to your fellow Jews? How can you sleep at night? Don't you know that these, your friends, whom you exploit, are consigning you to Hell! --- every time they pay the tax levy they curse you. When in God's name are you ever going to change? I hope the people round about me hear me laying you low, Matthew, because you deserve every single syllable of condemnation - - ! "

...did He talk like that?

Not at all!

But to the contrary, He simply said, in a very winsome way, as though to indicate to Matthew that He had found something in Matthew that He liked, that He needed. He said, "Matthew -- follow me!" And the record for it: Matthew left his past and marched right out into a glorious future, because he happened to meet a man who knew all about him, but who did not condemn him.

Another example, if you please. Turn now to the Gospel according to Luke. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. Word gets around as He passes through Jericho that He's coming. The people are all excited - - "Let's

get out on the street to see him -- He's the miracle-worker -- he's the great preacher! Rumor has it that something's going to happen to him when he gets to Jerusalem. He might never come this way again! And who knows but what he might perform his miracle-of-miracles here in Jericho! -- ".....so they all came out to see.

And a man by the name of Zacchaeus came too. Now Zacchaeus was a publican, a tax collector. And he was ostracized by the people who lived in Jericho -- so much so that when he came to find a place to stand, nobody gave him a place. They shoved him, they rejected him, they pushed him away. Add for some reason that I can't explain to you, Zacchaeus still wanted to see this man, runs down ahead of the crowd, climbs up into a sycamore tree.....and then the eyes of Zacchaeus meet the eyes of Jesus Christ. Do you think for a single minute that Jesus doesn't know about Zacchaeus? -- He, the perceptive one? Do you think He didn't know what the people of Jericho thought about him? Do you think for a single minute that Jesus did not know precisely why Zacchaeus happened to be where he was?

...what does He do? -- -- "Zacchaeus!" -- calls him by name. ...who knows but what some accent of love characterized the pronunciation of that name....."Zacchaeus, come on down! Get yourself out of that tree! You know what, Zacchaeus -- we're going to have a meal together . . . "

...and off He went -- not with the Chief Rabbi, not with the mayor of the town, not with the Elder in the Synagogue.....but with the ostracized one.

And as they sat and ate, it was a table conversation that changed a man's life. And the net result was -- you can have the word for it, you can find it for yourself in the Gospel according to Luke. When it's all over Zacchaeus says to the Lord, "If I've taken anything from any man by

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth, who had more right than anybody else who has ever lived to consign people to Hell, and do you ever have any record that He did it? I don't know that in the mind of God any person is ever totally evil. Would you believe me if I were willing to suggest to you there's always the possibility of 2% good?...20% good...50% good...60% good...70% good? And it was to this better side of our evil being that Jesus Christ was always appealing.

I have been debating with myself if, ever since I came to this pulpit this morning, as to whether I should say this or not, but tomorrow perhaps -- I think I'll wait until tomorrow -- there are at least three staff members to whom I ought to speak about something that I've found that's wrong, over the weekend, a situation that needs correcting. Well, for your comfort and theirs, if they should happen to be here, I am holding my breath because I'm not about to condemn until I'm in a position to recommend a corrective. And I dare say that's good counsel. Anybody might be able to tell you what's wrong. But to be able to help you from that point, to motivate you, to go in the better direction -- well, that's what Jesus Christ was always doing.

I'm going to put it for you in a way in which it's been put for a long, long time now: Jesus Christ hated sin. But He loved the sinner. Now you ask yourself, how in the world is that possible? Well, what is a sinner, or who is a sinner? A sinner happens to be a human being, he happens to be a person. And God has never given up treating people as persons. God is a people-person, that's what He is, who is always willing to begin where they are and take them from that point. Now that's the lesson we have to learn -- mother/daughter -- father/son -- husband/wife -- staff member/supervisor. You begin where they are. And then by the grace and the power of God through Christian compassion, you work toward a corrective. That's the better way. Now, I can't guarantee you

that it's always going to work. Jesus Christ himself never batted 100%.

...but I also know that if it is to work, that's the
only way that it will work.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity

September 30, 1973

"BEYOND CYNICISM"

Again as before we tell You,
 Heavenly Father, what You already
 know. We make so little time for
 the sort of thing that we're going
 to do now, to give some measure of
 undivided attention to Your Word.
 Since these times come so infre-
 quently, help us to make the most
 of this time. And that's why we're
 going to ask Your Holy Spirit to be
 upon us now. Amen.

1/2 inch 29's

You may as well know it, if you haven't been told already, that there are courses in divinity schools where young men in preparation for the ministry are taught how to preach. In days gone by the Seminary officials would look far and wide for someone gifted and skilled in the field, and invite him to come and occupy the Chair of Homiletics -- that's the fancy word for the art of preaching.

And like as not, the professor occasionally would assign the students in the class a particular text upon which they were to prepare a sermon, and then he would either read it or he'd expect them to stand up in class and deliver it. Then, hopefully, he would give them the benefit of his constructive criticism. Then there would be those students who, every now and then, might be invited to go out on a weekend and preach, and they might even seek out the counsel of the head of the department of preaching as they wrestled with a particular text.

Well, I don't mind telling you, now well into my fourth decade of preaching, I have had more than one moment when I wished my old professor of Homiletics were around, that I might go to him and say, "Now how would you

handle this?" That's particularly true for this morning, if you don't mind my telling you. For as I come to the text that commands my attention which I am constrained to share with you, there's almost little more that I can do with it than to tell you who said it, under what conditions, and to whom he said it.....and then almost march straight away from the text, hopefully in the direction to which it points.

Well now, here's the text -- go all the way back to the 29th chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah and you'll find as the 8th verse these words:

"And it shall be when a hungry man dreams,
and behold he wakens, that he wakens that
he had eaten, but is not satisfied."

Now here is the situation. Isaiah was trying to comfort the Chosen People of God. They did understand that one day the conquerer would come and destroy their city -- that would happen. They knew that. But when the conquerer would come and do this, he would be, said Isaiah, unsatisfied, . . . He would have his fill -- classically he said, "It will be as when a hungry man dreams and eats (in his dream, of course) -- "that he wakens, only to discover that his stomach is empty -- he hasn't been satisfied.... he hasn't been satisfied . . . " Now Isaiah's the one who said it, this was the period of time when he said it, and he said it as a word of comfort to the Chosen People of God.

Now, frankly, that's about all I can tell you about the text.

But I'm inclined to walk straight away with it now, in the direction to which it points -- simply to say to you that this can be true for most of us, that we are as people who dream of conquest, we are as people who think of great things that are going to happen for us, and in our dreaming we thoroughly enjoy them to the full....only to waken to the fact of life, to be shaken by reality, and to discover that we are not satisfied.

Or I can put it for you in this way: to reach for certain things, and to be thrilled in the anticipation of them, only to know that when the moment of grasping comes, they are elusive, they disappear, they're not there.

What am I trying to say to you? -- that any reading of life may lead any number of people to the conclusion that they have no alternative but to become cynical. What they wanted, what they searched for has brought meaning to them only in the searching.

We make much of the fact that we're a Family in God here in Saint Luke Church, and don't you ever dare underestimate the validity of that concept. It's one of the finest things about Saint Luke Church, that despite the fact that we have four different congregations on any given Sunday, and despite the fact that we are scattered significantly, geographically, and despite the fact that we come from a variety of strata -- culturally, economically, even racially -- nonetheless the fact is that we are a family. And every now and then I make bold to remind you of this. That's what I'm about to do now. Bear with me patiently.

You heard the first announcement this morning:

"Saint Luke Church marks the passing from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant of Wendell Anderson. Services will be held on Tuesday morning at 11:30 here in the Nave"

...as members together of the Family in God you should know what is found between the lines.

.....forty-one years of age, just coming into the prime of life, just coming into his greater usefulness - a precious child of God, a student of the Scriptures who never allowed a single day to pass without first reading the 91st Psalm,

by which he was strengthened and assured that God would watch over him....

...married to an exceptionally fine woman, the father of two precious children who are as spiritually sensitive as any children I have ever known....

Bear with me, you need to hear this.

...for some months now, being prepared for an advancement professionally, he's been forced to be separated from his family down there in Augusta, Georgia, while they stayed on here in Silver Spring. The advanced degree had been awarded, the promotion had been secured, and all the dreams now, what they would be doing together when they could be re-established here in Silver Spring, in Saint Luke Church and in his professional career. It was all to have been consummated yesterday.....this morning they were to be here as a family, giving thanks to God....

"Saint Luke Church marks the passing...of this servant."

Reaching for the stars as though it were in grasp -- it's gone! It happens time and time again. I can give you chapter and verse out of the lives of members of this parish. You could give me chapter and verse in your relationship with people that you know.

-- my friend Jay McCoy, a grand and noble spirit-- worked his way up, rugged individual that he was, and longed for the day when he could establish his sons in their own printing business in their own plant. They built the plant. They got the finest presses that they could get from the United States and Germany. They moved into the new plant, and on a Saturday night it was all geared for production Monday

morning. And Jay locked the doors and went home and slept....only to
w
waked in God's nearer presence - - never had the thrill of seeing the
first finished product come from the presses, and the first order filled,
and to be gratified by the look upon the faces of his sons.

...it's like a man who dreams, you see, only to be awakened by
harsh reality, and he's not satisfied....it's been
elusive.

They don't monitor the telephone calls at Somebody Cares. Oh,
they keep a log, as well they should, of the thousands upon thousands of
calls they have received since this, the finest thing that Saint Luke Church
does for the entire community, was inaugurated a few years ago. But I am
reasonably certain that if I were privileged to monitor some of those calls
(which I don't) - - I would come to the conclusion that many of those calls
come from young people who have become cynical. They hoped for more than
they're getting out of life. They're fed up with their parents. Some are
fed up with the church. They've wanted more, they've hoped for more than
they're getting....

...A young woman of eighteen committed suicide.

She left this note: "A year ago I made a sort of bargain with
God, and this is my part of the bargain. I agreed that if something did
not happen last year to make life worth living and to make me somebody,
that I would quit living . . . " I began by telling you that a young
woman of eighteen committed suicide.

It could be that most of us who think that we're normal have had
our moments when we wouldn't mind taking the back door out of life. We've
had our frustrations, we've had our fears, we've had our failures, we have
been disillusioned. Last year about this time I went out to Ohio to share

in the ministry of a colleague in the ministry, and he told me of the great blow that had come to him as he began his ministry, when the one whom he loved and on whom he counted so much was taken away from him -- just when he needed her most! And this servant of God railed out against God -- "God, how can you do this to me?"

. . . then he frankly admitted that he never got beyond cynicism until it occurred to him that he was not the center of the universe -- that he had no right to expect God to tailor life to him... that God was still in control...that while God did not ordain certain things, that there were some things that did happen in this world over which even God had no control...but that God would allow His purposes to be fulfilled despite disillusionment, despite disappointment, despite failure.

There is a verse in Scripture that I commend to all of you: "The Lord is my shephard -- comforter -- counsellor -- guide -- protector. And because He is, one need not want.

Now I'm realistic enough to know that if you've had a blow lately, you may be too numb to appreciate these words. I'm also realistic enough to know that if up to this point life has been like the Sahara for you, a constant sunshine, you may be insensitive to what I've said. But I have every reason to believe that what I have said needs to be said. And if perchance you might remember it, it could hold you in good stead.

He was a man both wise and good who, not long before he died, observed: "I have loved more than I have been loved. I have trusted more than I have been trusted. But the balance remains with me." And so it is. He had disciplined himself to the point where he had no false illusion regarding other people. The weaknesses in others did not shatter his ideals. The love that he continued to show the unworthy proved a save and stabilizing influence at the end. And this is what trust and faith in God is all about.

"SING PRAISE TO GOD"

THROUGH Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord, Who has placed in our heart
the song of the redeemed. Amen.

We went down to Kennedy Center Friday night, a week ago, the three of us, because we wanted to hear the distinguished artist. But I would be less than honest if I did not admit to you that at the very beginning he irritated me. He got in the way of the organ. I had gone there that night with a thirst in my soul to be satisfied by the strains of music. I was impatient for him to get to the keyboard, and I did not fully appreciate his comments. He intended them to be interpretative, he intended them to be of some value to every person who was there.

I also had my moments when I felt like getting up and leaving. But I am glad that I did not. As the concert continued, the better the evening became. And I found myself in that very awkward moment in which I was asking the artist to forgive me for having been irritated by his manner and by his presence.

We went there at 8:30, the concert began about 8:35....it continued until 11:20. There was encore after encore, standing ovation after standing ovation. He capped it all, of course, with his final number -- his own interpretation of a great hymn: "O God, Our Help In Ages Past." He invited us to sing.

...I wondered, as I stood there about to sing, what kind of a response he was going to get, because from my vantage-point as I looked around, it seemed to me that fully one-third of all the people who had filled the concert hall were under thirty years of age. Would they be inclined to sing a hymn.....would they know the words? I discovered very quickly,

as the singing began, that there wasn't a single person who was not singing!....

And then as we all continued singing so heartily, it occurred to me that a man would have been something of a piker not to have sung, or at least not to have wanted to have sung. You see, the artist had done his best, superbly so, and that motivated us to sing....it called for a response. Something wonderful happened that night in the concert hall, and every single one of us, I dare say, was affected by it. And whenever anything wonderful happens to you, you are constrained to respond. Whenever anything wonderful happens, you can't remain silent.

Do I have to tell you, those of you who are gathered here today, when the most wonderful thing that ever happened to the human race took place -- God had decided to invade this earth, the God who made us had decided that He could not turn His back against us. God had discovered that we were Hell-bent -- let me put it for you that way -- that we are prone to destroy ourselves. And God said, "I won't let it happen! I'll step in!" And that's the meaning of the Incarnation. So God came to us, to redeem us, that's the classic expression -- to save us. And when that was happening, what do you suppose the angels did? You know what they did -- they sang! From the very beginning, when Christ came to earth, this wonderful event has motivated people to sing. And to the very end of time, wherever people take the name of Jesus Christ and understand who He is and what He has done, they will be moved to sing.

You can't be religious and not want to sing. You can't be a Christian and not want to sing. Of all the religions, I dare say, none is a happier religion, a more joyful religion, than the Christian faith. Let me anticipate for you now, you'll be standing at the very end of this service, and you will be thrilled as the great von Beethoven himself reminds us to 'praise the Lord, ye sons of joy'that's what we are.

Now what has happened to us? Let me say it to you clearly: the most wonderful thing that could ever happen to you has already happened! Somewhere along the line you've had some knowledge of God. The fundamental fact that God is. The fundamental fact that God cares, that God has a continuing concern, and that God loves us. From a purely human point of view, is there anything more wonderful that can happen to a person than to know that someone loves him? When we're being loved, we're moved to sing!

I would be less than honest with you, my friend, if I didn't tell you there were times when this congregation has irritated me, because I've felt you could have sung far better than you did. Why, I'd say to myself, for these years I have been preaching to you the Gospel of God's love....I've been telling you that you are someone who is precious in God's sight....I have been telling you that God will never leave you, God will never forsake you. I have been telling you that God so loves you that He'll forgive all of your sins if you ask Him to forgive you. I have been telling you that no matter where you may go, you never walk alone -- you are accompanied by the Continuing Companion, the Perpetual Pilgrim....

...I have been telling you that the hand of God is always upon you and always outstretched and never empty!

...I have been telling you that even when you come to the moment of death, you don't have to be afraid! -- for you are a child of God, and Jesus Christ waits with outstretched arms, to welcome you.....

Now if this isn't enough to make a man sing!

Now the text for this meditation, if you please. Let's go all the way back to the 146th Psalm, something that was written centuries before Jesus Christ came on the scene. And yet a man, at that time, pondering the fact

of God and the goodness of God and the gracious quality of God, said something like this:

"Praise ye the Lord: praise the Lord, O my
soul.
While I live will I praise the Lord: I
will sing praises unto my God while I have
any being . . ."

Well now, that's really something - - a man who was so overwhelmed by the goodness of God, who said, As long as I live, as long as I have any breath, I am going to sing praises to God . . .

...now let me ask you, was he a tenor...a baritone...a bass.....?

...a high-pitched voice...a shrilly voice....?

I don't know. You'd like to think that he was a Jewish Carruso, perhaps, or a Dean Martin...a Pat Boone....a Perry Como. I can't tell you that he was, truthfully. I don't even know that he could sing. He might have been a moneypiece. But the important thing was that he was moved to sing. Now that's the thing that you and I daren't forget. Maybe we can't sing. Maybe we can't find ourselves in the chancel with these talented ones, and committed ones. The important thing is that we should be moved by the goodness and the grace of God to want to express ourselves.

In his book, "Applied Imagination" Alex Osborne refers to a Swiss gentleman who meticulously reviewed his 80 years on earth, and clever chap that he was, calculated how he spent those 80 years. According to the way he figured it - -

- - he had spent 26 of his 80 years in bed
- - he had spent 21 of those 80 years working
- - he had spent 6 of those 80 years eating
- - according to his calculation, he had to admit to himself

that he had spent about 6 of those 80 years being angry with people

-- he spent 5 years, according to his calculation, of those 80 years,
just having them frittered away while he had to wait on people
who were tardy in keeping their appointments

-- he figured that he spent 225 days out of those 80 years
scolding his children

-- clever chap that he was, with his applied imagination, it occurred
to him that he must have spent at least 26 days of those 80
years trying to tie his necktie....18 days out of those 80
years he spent blowing his nose...12 days were consumed out of
those 80 years in just keeping his pipe burning, lighting his pipe.

Then, he said, I figured that I had laughed only 46 hours in my entire life.

Now why have I brought this to your attention? Suppose you could be clever
enough at this point and time in your life to calculate how you spend your years.
With all the strength that I can command I rise to ask the question: How much
time in your life has been spent just giving praise to Almighty God? I know you
have spent a considerable amount of time complaining to him, asking "Why me,
Lord? -- how could this happen to me?" But every single one of us has been
on the receiving end of God's goodness, and to the day we die every single one
of us will be finding out that God gives us more than He takes away....

...and in the moment of death there is even the precious promise of eternal
life.

How much of your time have you spent in praising Him? How many hours in
your life have you been moved by the goodness of God? -- and if you would, you'd
sing so all the world could hear. And with that question I leave you.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ABOUT THE FUTURE LIFE"

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, We know full well what you already know about us - - we make so little time to do the sort of thing that we're going to do now, to give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. That we should make the most of it, bless us now by Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

John 14:2

On this day in the calendar of the Church which is known as All Saints' Sunday, it's right and proper that the sermon should bear the title, "About The Future Life" and the text, from that favorite Bible passage of yours, the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to John, the 2nd verse...the words, no less, recorded as the words of our Blessed Lord:

"In my father's house there are many mansions (or rooms). If it were not so I would have told you."

There was a cartoonist once who tried to speak to our day. Very cleverly he depicted a man and a woman, I presume at this season of the year, going shopping in anticipation of the Christmas giving season. They found their place at a counter over which was this sign: Educational Toys. The salesman was a very clever chap, and he took a measure of pride in promoting a particular item. I can't tell you now the name that was on the package, but I do remember as the cartoonist portrayed it for us - - inside the package was an odd assortment of a series of fragments, I presume some kind of a puzzle. And then with a rather wicked gleam in his eye the salesman said, "It's for today's youngster who lives in a complex world, because no matter how you put this thing together, it never comes out right."

You may think there's a bit of humor in that, but we're sobered immediately by the frightening thought that the truth inherent cannot be ignored.

We seem to live in a complex world where things never come out right! If that is true about life, it's equally true for some people about death. Not intending to be morbid at all, but one must realize the fact that death is always on the schedule of every person's life. And when people try to figure it out, they frankly come to the conclusion that no matter when it comes, it doesn't always make much sense.

For some people death comes too soon. For others, would you believe it, it seems to come too late. So you see, on that score and that score alone it doesn't seem to make much sense. Sometimes it comes without warning; sometimes we have the benefit of knowing; within a period of three weeks -- three months at the most.....and yet, even on that score, whether it comes suddenly or with a measure of warning, there are those who still walk away and say, "I can't understand it."

That you may know whereof I speak, let me bring to your attention now that even in the list in our act of remembrance before the altar of the Lord on this All Saints' Day, one of those names that was read was a young man, a member of this parish, who was on the very threshold of greater usefulness. His formal education was being completed. He was doing his practice teaching. And then on a Saturday night, without any warning whatsoever, his life was snuffed out in a horrible automobile accident.

...in that case death came too soon, and it didn't even make much sense.

On the other hand, on the same list that was read for you this morning in this fresh act of remembrance before the altar of the Lord, the name of a man fell into his 80s.....and on his Pastor, when I ministered to him, confined to a convalescent nursing home week after week and I dare say it went into the months, the parting lament seemed always to be the same, "Pastor,

why doesn't the Good Lord take me? - - pray that I may be taken home."

...in his case, so it seemed, death was late in coming, and for him it didn't make much sense. And for some others too, I suppose. And he ended his years in what could be classified as vegetation.

What now, as I stand at this sacred desk, can I say to you about it? Facing the future life, one goes back and remembers the words of Job -- he raised the question, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" Job, you were wrong. You don't say if. Anybody knows you say when. For every man has his moment of death. But the question remains, what's beyond the grave? What about the future life? What are our options?

Let us deal with them very quickly.

There are some who say, "When you're dead you're dead, and that's all there is to it - - there just isn't anything beyond." Well, that's a simple answer. Not very satisfying and surely not a Christian answer.

John Updike has a book called "Pigeon Feathers" in which he tells about a boy named David who discovered one day that his pet pigeon had died. And so he digs a grave for it, boy-like, and is about to bury his pet pigeon. And as he does so, he holds in his hand the lifeless bird.... and then discovers as he had not discovered before, the perfect symmetry of all that made that pigeon's wings, its formation. And even as a youngster David mused to himself, if God in His goodness would go to great pain to create something as wonderful and so necessary for a pigeon to fly through the air, even though its life-span should be so brief, what right did he have to believe that God who made so great investment in human life, the human soul, would simply allow it to have its brief span, and end. And that's all there would be to it. No, you can't say that when you're dead

you're dead, and that's all there is to it.

What's another option?

Well, you may live on, but you live on as your good deeds follow you. Well, some of us are troubled at that point. We can't think of what we might do that might be worthy of remembrance. Does that mean, then, that we have no promised life beyond our death?

...I remember when I first went to Springfield, Illinois, to pay my respect to that very great President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. Do I not remember correctly that there is a quotation from Scripture: "He being dead yet speaks" . . . ?

...Well, there are those who say, Sure, you live on. You live on as you're remembered. But many people die anonymously. Does that cancel out for them the promise of eternal life? They are never remembered.

There are those who say, Sure you live on, there's something beyond the grave because you live on in your descendants, those to whom you've given issue.....but what if you haven't given issue? -- is eternal life cut off for you? Will you no longer have the precious promise of something beyond the grave?

Well now I must hurry on. What did our Lord say about it? Surprisingly enough, Jesus Christ said very little about the future life. He never gave Himself to arguing about it, He simply assumed it. He looked upon it as a matter of fact. It was a blessed assumption. And one day He called to His side a group of His precious friends, and He spoke to them those words that you value - - He knew full well that the time was come when He was going to be separated from them, that His earthly pilgrimage would be completed, that death would come to Him even as it would come to them, and He said: "Let not

your heart be troubled -- believe in God! In my Father's house there is going to be a place for you" . . . which means it goes on!

If you were to press me now, my friend, I don't know much about life eternal. I've asked some of the same questions that you've asked when my own family circle has been broken, when twice within four years I laid to rest my father and my mother....And I've asked the questions, too -- what's beyond the grave? I don't know. But I can tell you what I believe. I believe the words of Jesus Christ, and He did not make us to be cut off by a final breath. "In my Father's house there's going to be room -- there's something yet beyond..." Jesus believed that. And that's why we believe Him, because it enabled Him to live the kind of a life that He did. I say to you with all the strength that my soul can command, what you believe about life after death determines the way you live before death.

A painter, about to do a landscape, will tell us that before he does anything on his canvas he first determines what the sky-scape is going to be. And after he's chosen his colors for the sky, then the colors from the sky determine what he paints for the earth. And as you and I believe in the co-eternation of life in Christ, then you and I live on this earth accordingly.

It's a precious moment today in the life of Saint Luke Church: Eric Evans, Michael Fress, Eric Holliday, Craig Newland, Philip Minney, John Lastova III, Steven Leitzel and Glen Laiseur are being admitted to the Lord's Table. What is the meaning of the Sacrament if it isn't this: that in and through the Sacrament we receive as we do not receive in any other way the forgiveness of all our sins and the precious hope of life eternal. To you, my young friends, about to come to the Sacrament for the first time, name any of the great saints, name the company of believers who have been translated from this world into Christ's nearer presence -- every single one of them knew what you are about to know, the surprise of the Lord's Supper which strengthens them to eternal life. Every time you receive the Sacrament, you introduce all over again the eternal dimension in your life by God.

"EVEN WHEN THINGS GO WRONG"

THROUGH Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

John 14:9

This is a day when it seems that no man is beyond scrutiny. The more prominent the public official, the more seriously we ask that the probe be taken. As I stand at the sacred desk this morning I have a suggestion to make. Suppose we supplied the same measure of scrutiny to God that we give to our public officials. Two questions, if you please, at once:

-- God, are you to be trusted?

-- God, is your integrity constant?

Now don't shy away from asking such questions. It's not blasphemous. For I presume the first thing that God requires from any of us is that we respond honestly to Him. And if this should be a measure of vexation with us, we ought not to be reluctant to ask such questions from God. There is precedent for it, if it is precedent you need by way of encouragement -- as long as we have had any kind of recorded religious history we discover that God has always had on His hands such people who question Him, who want to know if He's to be trusted, who want some evidence that His goodness remains pre-eminent. So as we gather this morning, quietly and earnestly, there are those two questions:

-- God, are you to be trusted?

-- Will your integrity remain constant?

I suppose the answer that you get to these two questions will depend upon the person to whom you put the questions, and I should add just as

quickly, as to when you happen to ask them. If you were to ask a man who has had religious habits as to whether or not God's goodness remains pre-eminent, a man whose good fortune has not wavered, his lot in life has been plentiful and pleasant, who perhaps every time he comes to church thanks God for any number of good things that have come his way. At this particular writing in his own personal life he has no complaints -- everything's been moving along splendidly....

-- now you ask that man if God's to be trusted and if His goodness remains permanent, you know the answer you'll get.

But suppose you ask the man who might live across the street, a man who not so long ago found out that his business partner whom he has trusted for a decade has turned out to be a scoundrel, and now he's being held responsible for all the chicanery of his partner, for in all likelihood to the very last pay check that he'll receive, a sizeable chunk of it will have to go to pay the debt that now rests upon him because he had a partner who was a rascal....

...now also as a part of this man's life, you ought to know it, within the last week he received the word from the surgeon that his wife's cancer is not operable.....and in addition to that, he and she together happen to be the parents of a son or a daughter where irreparable brain damage has beenddone because the kid has been a drug addict.....

...now you ask that man: is God's goodness pre-eminent"? Is He to be trusted? Does God look upon us benignly?

Don't be afraid to ask the questions. And again I say, the answers you get

may depend upon the person to whom you put the questions.

Now for the text -- but before the text let me tell you what the title of this sermon is. Titles frequently are chosen very carefully. The title for this sermon is "Even When Things Go Wrong" -- and the text, the 9th verse of the 145th Psalm:

"The Lord is good to all, and his
tender mercies are over all his
works"

I presume that was the morning when the Psalmist got out on the right side of the bed and had a good night's sleep....his children have all turned out well, and his business has prospered. But I am not so sure he's a typical Psalmist -- now be very patient with me while I justify that statement -- for as I read the Book of Psalms I discover all too frequently that most of the Psalmists have been people who have complained against God. He hasn't been showing up as speedily as they would like to have Him appear, and He hasn't brought enough into their defence, according to their own judgment -- they're in dire need -- "Where are you, God? -- it's about time you get around -- !" We usually talk about the Psalms as being the book of praise, but there's always the other side of the coin. where the Psalmist can be bitter because his back is constantly against the wall. When he cries out to God he cries out from the depths of his soul.

But this Psalmist -- "The Lord is good to all . . . his tender mercies are over all his works . . . " Well, fortunately that's the way it does end, no matter how the Psalmist may begin! No matter how inclined he may be to protest and to complain, and in this sense the Psalmist is typical for the note eventually is a note of praise and trust and admiration.

But how about you? One of the difficulties that comes to a pastor in his relationship to his people is that he's never quite certain as to

where his people may be in their religious growth and development -- he may think they're farther down the road than they actually are! And he's never quite certain as to what their basic concept of God may be. Now this is something that you and I dare not forget -- there are different levels in our thinking of God, and there are different levels in our thinking of life. Is the chess board black? or is the chess board white? according to Browning's Bishop.....you see, that's the question that's being raised. And when there are some people who read life realistically, they say life is filled with evil -- the preeminent note is not goodness, but it's evil. And the untoward, and the unfortunate which may come as the unexpected can deal you a dastardly blow. It's just a question as to when, and the degree of devastation.

We're indebted to a Britisher who wrote this limerick:

"God's plan made a hopeful beginning,
But man spoiled his chances by sinning;
We trust that the story
Will end in God's glory,
But at the present the other side's winning."

....and for many people that's a real reading for life today.

Well now, let's get back to this basic question: God, is your goodness preeminent? Are you great in your goodness and good in your greatness?...which means, are you always to be understood as a gracious God who gives us unbounded mercy? Well I suggest to you now something that we daren't forget -- the primary fact is, what is your basic concept of God? I would not take from any man the treasured thought that God is the giver of all good things. I don't know if I would want to go on living another day if I couldn't believe that I could come to God and ask for some good thing, and rightfully believe that in His storehouse of all treasured things He has something that has my name on it. I wouldn't take this thought away from any person, that God is the

the giver of all good things. But be careful, my friend, how you deal with that thought. Whatever you do, get yourself beyond the level that some people never seem to rise above: don't settle for the notion that God is a glorified Saint Nicholas or a Santa Claus, who looks automatically with the same measured smile upon anyone who approaches Him...and then automatically dips down deep in his bag that seems to have no end to it, no bottom, and just draws out, again mechanically or automatically, whatever His hand may happen to touch, and then give it to anyone who happens to be in front of Him. I warn you with all the strength that I can command, don't you dare settle for a concept of God which makes God a kind of "God-of-the-Hand-out" - - - He just isn't that kind of God.

And this is the risk that you may take, you see, when you allow yourself to believe that when you've asked for some good thing and wanted some good thing and God hasn't given it to you, that you can no longer trust Him, and that His integrity is no longer to be respected. Treasure, my friend, and cherish the thought that for those of us who belong to the Hebrew-Christian tradition, we have been taught to believe that God is good, and that God is never less than God, which means that He is never less than good. And in all of His relationships with us, good, then, does remain preeminent. And because He is good, this may dominate His withdrawing from us when we ask for something, or rather, withhold from us what we may ask.

How long will it take us that the big thing that comes in getting a gift is not the gift in itself, but the love that prompts the giving of a gift. And because this is true in our relationship with God, His goodness remains preeminent.

Let me give you a very simple illustration that any father here

ought to be able to understand, any mother and any youngster who is at all sensitive, might have that maturity about him that he can appreciate what I am about to say. I, a father of two sons, even to this day find myself on the end of things where a request is being made. I would be less than honest if I did not say to you that I know a measure of gratification in realizing that even to this day there's no reluctance on their part to reach out in my direction and to ask for something that they need. And I'm grateful to Almighty God if I may be at that position in life where I am in a better situation to give them what they ask than I was earlier. Now, in the request that comes, I may or may not be able to give according to their asking, but what's more important than anything else is the fact that they don't hesitate to ask, that there is this measure of trust that gives evidence of a relationship that exists between them and me, and the responsibility that rests upon me as one who is older to give according to my wisdom, limited as it may be, or to withhold, according to my wisdom, limited as it may be. So that in the relationship that continues to exist, goodness remains.

Some of us, you see, are confused. We think that God isn't good unless He is always giving us something. I could cite for you out of my experience as a pastor parents who have ruined their children because they have not loved them wisely enough. There's a measure of wisdom that means a time they don't give, but you withhold! Now sometimes in our limited understanding of God, and in the dark night of our soul when we cry out for something and when things go wrong for us, and God doesn't loom on the horizon, and as we snap our fingers He fails to correct them for us immediately, we may be prone to complain and to protest. But the fact does remain: the Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all . . . "

He is never less than good.

And I am delighted to tell you that there are people in this congregation who have come and told me that they have been brought nearer to God when things went wrong, because then they've known a measure of dependence upon God who could be trusted, to guide and direct, within their limitations, and they were brought into a whole new relationship with God that they never knew before, when in their time of plenty they never so much as looked in His direction.

I want to conclude with a very simple thing that I'm about to share with you. I shan't identify the group, nor shall I identify the old people's home. But there was a group of young people who were sensitive to their involvement in the needs of other people. And when they got together they said: What can we do to really show ourselves Christian? So somebody proposed the idea that what they might do, as a group they might go to visit the old people's home, and then individually each youngster would take upon himself the responsibility of a resident of that home, a kind of a 'pal' relationship, or a gracious gesture. And so then a committee was appointed....they came up with recommendations and off they went to the old ~~people's~~ people's home, and each youngster going to see a particular resident and taking that resident something.

When it was all over they got together and made an assessment, a self-congratulatory thing -- it went off beautifully. And they had reason to believe that the residents in the old people's home were blessed because of their gracious gesture. Well then some wit, some youngster far more perceptive than maybe some of us are, stood up and said, "Well the next time we go, let's not take anything, but each one take himself!....and each one just spend a little time with that person, with nothing in his hand, but just

share, in a very real way, person-to-person, individually, some measure of love, some measure of trust and some measure of understanding."

Stick with it, my friend, when the story is ultimately written in your life and my life, the thing that will matter most may not be so much what we can't or don't get with our hand what was given or what was withheld as the relationship that existed between God and us. And if you've never understood it before, I beg you to think about it seriously. More than anything that God wants to give to us is Himself.....

...and sometimes that thought comes to us clearest
in the dark night of the soul.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NOW ABOUT JUDGMENT DAY - - "

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

One of the characteristics of the human mind is that it gives itself easily to drawing a sharp and dividing line as it assesses the human situation. As an example, notice how quickly you draw a dividing line as I even mention but one of two words:

rich / poor

good / bad

perfect / imperfect

complete / incomplete

saved / unsaved

ready / unready

...you and I are prone to do that kind of thing -- to draw sharp and dividing lines.

But it's one thing for us to do it. It is another thing to allow God to do it. For you and I, if we could, may have our moments when we would stay the finger of God, when the finger of God draws a dividing line in the Day of Judgment. But any reading of the Scriptures forces us to respect that according to the teachings of Jesus Christ, when the Day of Judgment comes, the finger of God does draw a dividing line and on either side of that line will be the saved....and the unsaved -- the ready....and the unready. No matter how much you may press me, no matter how much you may wish it otherwise, that's precisely what I have to tell you today, that in the time of Judgment a sharp and dividing line will be drawn and the division and the distinction will be made: saved /

unsaved.....ready / unready.

In the closing days of the life of our Blessed Lord here on earth He spent a great deal of His time just talking about this sort of thing. In fact, we have a whole series of stories that He told that we characterize as Parables of Judgment, and one of those was read for us today by the Lesson Reader. Maybe you'll want to check it out for yourselves again today -- the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. Before Jesus finished telling that story, a dividing line was drawn.

Well, let me fill you in just quite incidentally.

He loved to tell stories, and again and ever so often He held people in the hollow of His hand as He depicted for them the wonderful truths of God. I think this time when He told the story many of His hearers must have had their mouths drooling, because He was talking about a wedding. And like as not, for them, as soon as He mentioned a wedding, it meant a wedding feast.

Now, it's true today as it was then, that there is a sharp dividing line between the people who live in the Middle East. There's no such thing as middle class in the Middle East. You either have the very, very few who are the very, very wealthy, or you have the great many who are the very, very poor. And it was to this lot of people, the very poor, that our Blessed Lord was addressing His words. And so they got all excited when He mentioned the possibility of a wedding, because when they would get invited to a wedding, it meant for many of them the only good and sumptuous meal they might have in many a month. And because they were the deprived and the disadvantaged, they were the ones who carried around with them constantly the burdens and the pressures of life. And I can see them -- those creases on their brows, those sad lines on their faces, how they began to be erased when He mentioned the possibility of their being invited to a wedding -- because that would be a happy time for them,

when the cares and the burdens of life could be thrown aside if only for a couple of nights -- they would be free to sing and to dance and to laugh.

...and our Blessed Lord said, "It's on the calendar -- it's a scheduled event - - it's coming!" And when it did come,

says Jesus Christ, not everyone got inside! -- the line was drawn!

You can check out for yourself why that happened to be true, but according to the story, some didn't make it.

Now for our purpose this morning, when our Blessed Lord told that story, He told it as a coming event -- He had His eye on the future -- He was dealing with a tomorrow. Now let's clearly understand this, tomorrow does come. We have never missed a tomorrow yet. From the dawn of time there has always been a tomorrow, and only a fool would allow himself to think that he could live in a world without a tomorrow. And because this is true, people get ready for tomorrow. They make preparation. That's why some of you buy stock, invest in bonds, that's why some of you read as the first page in the newspaper in the morning the financial page, because you're being concerned with your preparation against the future that's inescapable, and you take a measure of pride because you can purchase certificates of deposit....and you do have a bank passbook that provides you the highest yield. You want to get ready. You want to be as independent as you can as you prepare for a future. And I wouldn't discredit any man who lays store against the tomorrow that most certainly will come. In fact, I'd rebuke those who look to other people to take care of them and don't make the necessary preparation themselves.

But I haven't come to this sacred desk this morning simply to advise you to get ready in a material sense, that you might be held in good stead when the lean years set in. But rather I have come with all the strength that my soul can command to ask you to respect another truth: in the tomorrow that

is certain to come, you ought to have ready a reservoir of the things of the spirit, for in the inescapable tomorrow there will always be demands made upon you, for your honor, your integrity, your patience, your wisdom, and your compassion. There is no future when these things will not be required of us. And what now, when that tomorrow comes, if you should be lacking in the things of the spirit?

Not very well noted by the greater percentage of you is the fact that for a number of weeks now we've had two groups of people meeting, one on a Wednesday morning and one on a Saturday morning. These groups have been conducted by one of the two clinical psychologists retained by Saint Luke. The courses deal with Parent Effectiveness Training. And as I sat in once or twice in these courses, it occurred to me that in all reality what was happening was this: the clinical psychologist was trying to get parents ready so that they might be able to cope with the problems of later childhood and adolescence, that when the demands are made upon them, they will be prepared.

Some of us wish, of course, that we might have had the advantage of such training when the 60's came upon us. Some of us, so it seemed, were totally unprepared when we had on our hands the Now generation, the young folks who demanded from us patience.....firmness....wisdom...compassion....understanding, and some of us were always running out of compassion, firmness, love -- never enough time to listen. The decade of the 60's descended upon us and to the day we die some of us will rue the fact that we were quite unprepared. We ran out, day after day after day, of the things of the spirit.

Little known to most of you, of course, is the fact that twice within recent months we've had small groups meeting at Bethany, couples who have been married. The last group we had, the spectrum was wide -- one couple have been married only seven years, the longest number of years was a couple who had been married thirty-three years. Now one of the things that we did

in that conversation-in-depth in Bethany was to suggest to them that "On the basis of your experience now as a married couple, on the basis of what you have learned through these years of marriage, suppose you had to write a marriage vow - - on the basis of what you now know, what would you say to one another on the day that you were married, if that situation were possible?" One perceptive chap said: Help me to understand that when the problems arise, we should be able to meet those problems together.

...well now, there's something for you! -- to be able to be prepared for married years with the understanding that the problem is to be met together....

But it takes two people to resolve, and two people looking in the same direction with the same objective. Well, there are marriages that deteriorate because somewhere along the line we were falling to prepare ourselves with that measure of understanding.

My friend, I would do you a disservice if when I stand at this desk this morning I gave you to understand that as the future unfolds, it will bring only one problem after another. That may be a realistic reading of life. But on the other hand I am happy to tell you that as the future unfolds it will also offer you good things, precious things! That's the wonderful thing about being a believer -- something good by the hand of God is always bound to be offered. That's why the Apostle Paul could say, as he thought of life, "I know that all things can work together for good to those who love the Lord." So don't read the future always with somber, sordid notes. Brace yourself for the happy thought that the hand outstretched which is God's will held in it some good thing.

You daren't miss that, you see. Jesus was telling these people who heard Him tell the story that it was a bright and beautiful thing that was

going to take place, it was a wedding, it was a happy event, that was scheduled in the future, it was something to look forward to, to help them lift themselves beyond the monotonous routine of life. Some good thing was going to happen.

I frankly confess to you as I am wont to do on occasion from this desk, that I wish to God I could begin my ministry all over again tomorrow morning. And if I could, I think I'd spend more time talking with young people about the fact that the future as it unfolds, by the hand of God, is a good future. And that for those who put their trust in Him good things are bound to happen. And how against the climate of the present day, I'd have to zero in on this whole matter of sex. As best I could I'd give them to understand that I do understand how there is always the temptation to exploit sex, there is always the temptation to spoil it. This is true. And this I most certainly understand.

But I think I would also have to tell them that I'm always saddened when I discover that there are those who desecrate it, who ruin it. Because who knows but what in God's plan for their life, just around the corner, in the tomorrow that's certain to come, there is that perfectly beautiful and lovely person. And against that day when it will happen, God wants them to be chaste and pure. Now those words chaste and pure belong properly to not just one sex alone. They belong to the man as well as to the woman.

But many an individual who has allowed himself all measures of indiscretion -- reckless, sinful behavior, when the day came that could have been a far better and brighter tomorrow -- unprepared for it! For the energies had been wasted, and dissipated, against something that was meant to be perfectly beautiful and wonderful.

Now I know there are those of you who say to me, Pastor, we don't quite understand this business of Judgment Day. Jesus Christ was always talking about a Judgment Day in the latter part of His life -- what about this day

that's finally going to come, and the line will be drawn -- the saved, and the unsaved....the ready, and the unready -- we don't quite understand it. Well I wish that you did. And part of my responsibility is to help you to face up to this fact that there will be a day of this type. Go ahead and brand me fundamentalist, I most certainly believe it. But on the other hand I must also tell you this: that in a certain sense every day is a kind of Judgment Day, because every single day that you live demands are being made upon you. And when those demands are made, you'll either be decent, or indecent.....honorable, or dishonorable.....good, or bad.....behave as one who is redeemed, or unredeemed.

Now take heart, my friend. I'm happy to tell you that for those of us who belong to the Christian persuasion, God has Heaven in mind for every one of us -- bright and beautiful and happy thought -- the best is God's gift to us in His promised Heaven. And every day that you and I spend here on earth is preparation for it, so that when the hour does come we may be found ready. That's why my soul usually is at alert when I hear those words pronounced in the Absolution:

"The Almighty and Merciful God grant unto you,

being penitent, pardon and remission of all

your sins.....time for amendment of life . . . "

...that means, a free translation -- every day is a chance to get ready.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

" - - ABOUT MARY AND JOSEPH "

O GOD, quiet our minds and hush
our hearts, for that's the only
way we can begin to know the real
meaning of Christmas. Even so,
come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Each of these four Sundays preceding the Night that marks the Holy Nativity, as I am privileged to stand at this sacred desk, I want to invite you to think about the people who were part of that first Christmas. Let me say to you at the very beginning, that when you think about Christmas properly, you usually do not think of just one person and one person alone. Christmas essentially can never be shared by one person by himself. It's the very nature of Christmas to be shared. And when you think of that first Christmas, the only people I dare say that you think about individually -- the wicked King Herod, and the insensitive and indifferent innkeeper -- come now, they're the only ones you think about individually! And they are the ones who were left out of the circle of Christmas. When you think about Christmas properly, invariably you think about two or more people, never less than two --

...Mary-and-Joseph.....

...Shepherds who said one-to-another, "Let us now go unto

Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass."

Tradition has it, as you well know, it was not one wise man, but wise men, and we like to think three in number. Whenever you think of Christmas -- remember it and remember it well, never less than two to celebrate Christmas, two or more.

So today, as we think of those who were within the circle of that first Christmas, let me pay tribute to a man and his maid -- Mary, blessed one, and Joseph the faithful. You know, of course you do, that Christmas was God's

idea! Make no mistake about that. God's chuck-full of ideas. Would you be willing to accept the notion that Christmas was God's better idea? All of God's ideas are good - - -

- - take that idea of creation. In fact He himself felt so good about it that when He was done He called it good . . .

- - then He went on to another good idea, choosing one people on the face of the earth through whom a blessing could come to all mankind. . .

- - it was a good idea when He singled out that man named Abraham . . .

- - then He went on to another idea, and He singled out a man named Moses, and he became the law-giver and led the Children of Israel out of bondage into the land of freedom, the promised land - - good idea . . .

- - then He went on to prophets, priests, kings, judges.....

...and because we are a perverted people, because there is this strain called original sin, none of us at any time in history ever seem to respond as well as we might have responded to each of His good ideas. So God had to come up with a better idea -- Christmas!

Did it ever occur to you that when God wants to pull off one of His ideas, He doesn't do it by Himself. There's a passage in the Today's English Version of the Gospel according to Saint Luke that I find quite intriguing. It reads simply, "There isn't anything that God can't do." The old translation used to read like this: "With God all things are possible" - - - "With God nothing is impossible". Today's English Version: "There isn't anything that God can't do."

But I'm intrigued by the thought that when God comes to do something, like as not He will not do it unaided. The only thing for the moment that I know that God ever did all by Himself, without any kind of assistance, was Creation. But from that point on, when God wants to pull something off, He looks around for human assistance, and His preferred way of operating is always to use human beings.

Now when God came to perform that great miracle called Christmas, He looked down from Heaven above and He said to a man and his maid, "I need you" -- which is simply to say, "I can't do it by myself."

Suppose Mary and Joseph would have said, "Some other time, God"? ...suppose Mary and Joseph would have said, "It isn't worth it, God! -- don't try it! -- the risk is too great!" . . ? Suppose Mary and Joseph would have gone on arguing with God, wasted God's precious time, finding all the reasons why they could refuse God. Ah, that's it. Suppose they would have refused, rejected the notion? Now, then, could God have wrought the great miracle called Christmas?

I believe in miracles. I hope to the day I die I'll go on believing in miracles. For when I breathe my last, it's the miracle of salvation that's going to mean most to me, the miracle of God's grace that I, a sinner, could be saved. And to do that, God had to work a miracle! And to work that miracle He had to look for two people, Mary and Joseph, through whom He could channel the incarnation of His love who became our Redeemer.

I am convinced that more and more God is trying to get us to understand that He wants us to enter into a partnership with Him, and to know the joy of seeing things come off according to the divine plan. Karl and Tim, and David and Mark, and Dennis and Kim, and Mark and John -- --

(group of confirmands to receive first Communion)

- - - God has ideas for your life. God needs you in His planning. There are some things He wants done in this world as only you'll allow them to be done through you. And when you come to receive the Sacrament, what is He doing but empowering you, and giving you strength and re-direction, forgiving your sins so you can start all over again to be part of the miracle of His life and His love.

For I say to all of you who are here, if it's a miracle you're looking for as the hope, give God a chance -- respond to His direction. Then one day you might know the joy of the woman who said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour . . ."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

" - - ABOUT THE SHEPHERDS "

WE BELIEVE, O GOD, that it can happen,
that here in this place as before you
can make Your claim upon us, some echo
of the Eternal Voice can be heard and
our minds and consciences quickened to
leave this place with an earnest desire
to live as Your servants in a waiting
world. To that end we wait now to be
better prepared. Amen.

Being sentimental and being sensitive are not the same thing. There is a world of difference between the two. Being sentimental can be quite superficial, so therefore I suggest that you guard yourself against the sentimentality which is sometimes associated with Christmas. Christmas, properly understood, belongs to those who are spiritually sensitive.

Now having said that, let me remind you what was said as this series of Advent sermons in Saint Luke Church was begun last Lord's Day: Christmas, to be properly appreciated, must be appreciated as you see it through the eyes of two or more people. Christmas to be properly appreciated must be shared -- it's never a solitary matter, a solitary journey, never a solitary experience. As an example, it was called to your attention that those who were found within the circle of Christmas that first holy night were people who were linked one with another, that when you think of individuals regarding that holy night, you think of people who were outside the circle of Christmas --

-- the wicked King Herod -- you think of him as an individual

-- the innkeeper, indifferent as he was, you think of him

as an individual

...you name each of them by themselves, and they
were outside the circle of Christmas.

But those who were inside the circle of Christmas -- always two or more people.....

...we say they were wise men who had that holy pilgrimage . .

...shepherds, who said one to another, "Let us go now even

unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass

which the Lord has made known to us . . "

...Joseph did not go up to Bethlehem by himself, and Mary-and-Joseph

went up to Bethlehem.

Now the question has to be asked this morning -- how come, that there are those who can be found within the circle of Christmas, and there are those who are found outside the circle of Christmas? How do you account for the fact that some can be spiritually sensitive and others not? To get with it immediately, go ahead and ask the question: Why were the shepherds told? How did they get to know about it? Why were they the ones, of all the people at that time, who received a special revelation?

I frankly admit to you that there is some degree of uneasiness as I stand here dealing with this sermon. I'll tell you why shortly. I don't know whether I would prefer to have this sermon preached to me by somebody else, and I were on the listening end, or whether I would have to assume the responsibility, as I now do, of preaching the sermon. Let me say it again, there's a fair degree of uneasiness about this thought, because I'm about to tell you what you may not have realized before, that the special revelation regarding the birth of Jesus Christ that holy night was not made known by God through His special representatives to a bunch of people who had come together for a church meeting.....the special revelation was not made known to a group of people who had gathered themselves together in order to draft some resolution and to make some formal proclamation to the world regarding the goodness and the grace of God. This special revela-

tion that came from the angels to a group of people did not come to people who were found in the synagogue.....

...now don't get me wrong - - it is important that people should gather together for religious purposes, to be instructed in truth, to be edified and nurtured by Word and Sacrament and to make formal pronouncement. All of these have a purpose. But there's a bit of uneasiness when I tell you that the angels made their declaration, not to a group of people confined within certain walls as sacred and holy as we say these are, but the angelic host looked for a handful of men, out on a hill, and to them the special revelation was made.

I've got to tell it to you as it is. And don't you think for a single minute that I'm encouraging you now to become lax in your worship habits -- heaven forbid that anybody should come to that conclusion. But I am constrained to tell it to you as the Good Book itself has recorded it -- to shepherds watching their sheep, to them the special revelation came.

Why to them? I have a notion or two. If you don't mind, I'd like to tell you why I think they were the fortunate ones and why they were the blessed ones. It may hold you in good stead. It strengthened my soul as I thought about it.

One, I think the good news came to them especially because they were men who knew what it was to give themselves to reflective thought. I'm not so sure that we know how to do that. They had plenty of time to think....

...they weren't scheduled to go to any number of church meetings . .

...they didn't have to worry about sitting at a desk and answering
one telephone call after another . .

...they didn't have to worry about phrasing particular words and
drafting certain letters . . .

...they didn't have to give meticulous attention to that kind of
thing . . .

All they had to do, as they whiled away the hours beneath the silvery silence of the stars in the midnight blue of a Judean night was to think -- -- something that's become a lost art for our generation.

I think you can better appreciate this if I were to tell you that suppose Pastor David and Mr. Clawson and I had agreed before you came, that within sixty minutes that we spend together now, we would deliberately design a period of time, maybe twenty-five minutes, when there would be complete silence in this place...

...Mr. Clawson's fingers would not move back and forth
across the keyboard.....no choir would stand up to sing
during that time.....Pastor David would not be at the
lectern and I would not be here at the pulpit....

...and for twenty or twenty-five minutes you would be encouraged to do nothing but just to sit quietly and to think, and to make the most of that period of time through reflective meditation. I don't know that you could pull it off.

There are people who crave for silence, but when it comes they don't know how to handle it. There are some people who almost go crazy when the television set goes dead, when the telephone doesn't ring, when nobody breaks the monotonous routine of their day's chores. Let it be clearly understood that God is still in control of His world. He's still busy, He's at work. But a lot of people don't know it, because to understand the way God is at work one needs to think. In religious jargon that means one needs to pray, one needs to meditate reflectively.

Oh, you have to understand it also, that when these shepherds sat and thought, it wasn't as though they just threw themselves into neutral. That isn't the best way to make the most of silence, just throwing yourself in neutral. You've got to think about something. I'm willing to suggest to you that these shepherds were men who knew their Scriptures. They were devout men -- I honestly believe this -- and as they grew up in Jewish homes they were taught the Scrip-

tures. I think they must have memorized certain passages from the prophets.

If I had my ministry to begin all over again, and how I wish I could begin it all over again - - - I would emphasize as never before the high value of memorization -- to be able to readily recall some passage of Scripture, some precious gem from literature, some kernel of truth as it came to you from a poet's mind and a poet's heart. I think these shepherds as they sat there night after night and day after day, with nothing on their hands but time by which to think, saw things from a divine perspective. Isn't this one reason why they were sensitive, then, when the heavens were opened and angels sang?

Did you ever ask yourself the question why no one else seemed to have heard the angels sing, but they did? - - why no one else seemed to have seen the heavens opened, but they did? Joan of Arc, according to Bernard Shaw's interpretation of her, has the Dauphin come to her one time and say to her, "These voices! these voices! - - you're always hearing voices! Why don't I hear voices?"and doesn't she reply to him, "You could hear them, if only you'd listen." Well, I have this to suggest to you, that I think this is one reason why the shepherds drew the great benefit of the special revelation as other people did not.

And there's a second reason. Whether you're willing to accept it or not, I don't know - - but I hold to it rather strongly: they were men of basic integrity who did an honest day's work. They gave themselves to the task at hand, and they looked upon the kind of thing that they were doing as God's responsibility thrust upon them. You're not forgetting, are you, that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, and He was one time called upon to give somebody an unforgettable picture of God and to have them better understand His nature and His personality, He said something to them about a good shepherd - - that's how honest and good the shepherd was in the mind of people. And even centuries before Jesus Christ, David, when he pictured God, did not hesitate to picture God in the terms of a man who

was a shepherd - - so great was their integrity, and what an honest day's work they did. I'm suggesting to you, you see, that if you go about your day's work honestly and well, with the stamp of integrity upon it, God has His own way of making a revelation to you in that way, too.

Now if it's not made plain at this point, let it be perfectly clear before the sermon concludes, Luther is quite right when he observes that there is no such thing as a profane or a merely secular vocation from which God is absent and in which God cannot be served. It is the Lord himself, says Luther, who milks the cows, through him whose occupation it is. Now that's something to think about.

Roland Bainton, God bless him! - did something which was a very remarkable thing some time ago - - he went and read all the sermons that Martin Luther preached during Advent, and he compiled some of the extracts in the Martin Luther Christmas Book. In the section that deals with the shepherds this is what you find, referring to the fact that the shepherds came and then they went back to their day's work --

" - - and the shepherds returned . . . "

says Luther, "Why, this is wrong!

We should correct the passage to read: 'They' -- meaning the shepherds -- 'went and shaved their heads! -- fasted! told their rosaries and put on cowls!' Why, instead we read, 'The shepherds returned' - - where to? Oh, that can't be right," says Luther, "Did they not leave everything and follow Christ? Must not one forsake father, mother, wife and child to be saved? But the Scriptures say plainly that they returned and did exactly the same work as before. And they did not despise their service, but took it up again just where they left off."

And I would remind you in conclusion that long ago in England companies of people in towns and villages used to produce plays that told the story of Jesus and what He means to His friends. Many of these plays were called Nativity Plays. They

told the wondrous story of the birth of the Saviour. In one of these plays, in the old English town of Chester, the shepherds came to see the Baby, bringing to Him the shepherds' gifts....

...one brought a bell, the kind of a bell that brought
the sheep home....

...one brought a porridge bowl with its horn spoon tied on
with a string, for shepherds have to eat in the moors and the
hills.....

...and another brought his reed pipe, the pipe that would while
away the hours of loneliness with happy tunes...

...they were simple things that they used in their daily work, for it was while they were busy in their day's work that the great revelation came to the shepherds.

Now one final thought. There is a story that I never tire of telling people. It's the story of a man who made it his business to talk to other people about Jesus Christ, and trying to impress upon them the need of being born again and to commit yourself to Christ. He did this during his lunch hour where he worked in the shop. And one day he had the great joy of having a man say to him, "You've convinced me! - - I claim Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour right now!".....and then he said to the man who was the instrument of God's grace, "What do I do next?" - - as much as to imply, "What committee will you appoint me to down at church?...do you expect me to teach Bible School? - is that the very next thing that I do, or to sing in the choir, or to go call on somebody else? -- what do I do right now?" And the man who was God's spokesman to him shocked him by saying, "The very next thing that you do, and you do it now, is to make sure that you give the boss an honest day's work."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Herod was troubled when he heard about the star. [You won't be troubled by the star, not if you are wise like the wise men of old. They took the star so seriously that when they saw it 'they rejoiced with exceeding great joy' and followed it to Bethlehem. They knew the legends. They had met Herod, and they knew him for what ~~the~~ he was. They knew the difference between what he stood for and the matchless things for which the star would forever stand. Without hesitation they took their stand beside the manger, leaving their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

What is more, when they followed the star where it led, the wise men found what they really wanted. They found God. There is no other way to find Him, save by following the mystery of it is that when we ~~find God~~ follow, we find God seeking us -- when we really follow anything - it becomes personal'.

(a)

Matt 2:1-2

Remove the placing of
the wise men until Jan 6

[The incomparable story of the wise men belongs properly not to the festival of Christmas as such but to that of the Epiphany, which the church from early times has celebrated on the twelfth day after Christmas, January 6.]

By including this story in his account of the birth of Jesus, Matthew gives symbolical expression to his belief that the child who was born as the Son of David - the long promised Messiah and Saviour of the Jews - was to be manifested to the Gentiles also and to become the object of universal belief and worship. That the Wise Men are represented as Gentiles, is clear from the fact that they came from the East ---]

(7)

ET 12/89 - '62 Math 2:1-2

[But we should note that the Wise Men came in response to a given sign - for we saw His star in the East - - -]

- Various attempts have been made to identify the star - was it Halley's comet? who knows - the writer of the story regarded it as a supernatural phenomenon - symbolically, the star represents a supernatural sign given by God to direct men's paths to Christ. Here, at every stage of the working out of the divine purpose, we see God taking the initiative - always when a man's journey to Christ is traced back to its source, the initiative

(C)

Math 2:11-2 ET 12/59-62

meets with God. Paul in his letter to the Romans -
in a passage in which he is ^{speaking} ~~teaching~~ of God's
universal purpose of salvation - with irresistible logic
asks the series of questions: 'How then shall they call
on him in whom they have not believed? and how
shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?
and how shall they hear without ^a preacher? And how
shall they preach, except they be sent?' And the answer,
of course, is God. And Jesus Himself, according to the
logos of ~~the~~ John, said: 'No man can come to me,
except the Father which hath sent me draw him' - - The

(d)

show us God's way of leading the wise men —
 He draws men to Christ in many different ways,
 but His usual way of doing so is by means of
 the Church's preaching of the Gospel — }

[Secondly, we must note that the sign given
 to the wise men was one that was readily intelligible
 to them and peculiarly ~~situated~~ suited to their
situation in life. These men were astrologers by profession.
 The word used of them MAGI, a name ^{which} originally belonged
 to a Median tribe and later to a Persian priestly caste
 but which eventually came to be applied to astrologers

(e)

Math 2:1-2

and various types of magicians. These ^{were} even whose daily task was to study the stars, in an attempt to understand what they had to tell about the course of human affairs. We may be ~~skeptical~~ sceptical about the value of such researches in our modern age, but it was widely believed in the ancient world that the stars exerted an influence on the world's affairs. In particular it was believed that stars announced the birth of great men. The Magi in our story would be the experts in this field of research.

[As the story suggests that the divine revelation given

(f)

Matt 2:1-2

to these men was given in a language that was intelligible and meaningful for them. It was something that came to them as they diligently pursued their everyday tasks. And this in turn suggests that God's approach to men is always one that meets them where they are, that speaks to their condition. The supreme example of this, of course, is the Incarnation itself.

— the implication for the Quran is plain —

God still seeks to reach men where they are and to speak to them in terms they can understand

(9)

Matt 2:1-2 ET 12/62 - 89

Thirdly, the magi came only because they
were willing to make the necessary response to
the sign

It is not unreasonable to suppose that they were not the only ones who beheld the star; and even if they alone understood its significance they would presumably not have kept the discovery to themselves. Yet they alone, apparently, were prepared to act upon that discovery, setting it on the long and arduous journey to Jerusalem. It was a journey that called for considerable effort and dauntless courage - and above all faith.

(10)

ET 11/62-90 Matt 2:1-2

Like the above way, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, conveyed through the proclamation of the gospel, must always meet with this quality of faith in those who hear, if it is to succeed in its purpose. Throughout the history of the Christian church, while the gospel has been preached to ever-increasing multitudes of men and women, there have always been those of whom the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews have been only too unhappily true: "Good news came to them, but the message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the heavens" and faith demands an active

(11)

ET 11/02-90 Matt 2:1-2

effort of mind and heart and will
on man's part.]

[Finally, it must be emphasized that
the Magi came in a spirit of humble
submission in worship.]

- They offered the best they had

"ABOUT THE WISE MEN"

Because, O God, they were made quiet,
they were able to hear the angels
sing; because, O God, they looked up,
they were able to see the star. Let
that be our experience now. Amen.

By this time you know that each Sunday morning during Advent as you come to this place, we're thinking about those people who made up the first Christmas, at least who were part of it. We began on the First Sunday in Advent with Mary and Joseph...then last Sunday we talked about the shepherds. This morning it's the Wise Men.

Well let me admit at once that the questions that have gone through your mind have gone through my mind too, questions such as these . . .

...who were they really?

...were they kings, and was one of them from Africa?

...did they come from Persia? ...were there really three of them?

...when did they begin their journey? ...and how long

did it take?what were their names?

We've dealt with these questions, you see, in an even legendary way -- their names Caspar...Melchior...Belthazar? What about their gifts? Why, of all things -- gold....frankincense....myrrh -- what use would they be to a baby? What could they mean to a peasant girl become a mother?

Well, I can't answer these questions for you, really I can't. And I don't know how much I ought to make of the fact that we're not sure that there were even three of them. The Bible simply says, " -- and wise men came from the east to Jerusalem, saying, where is he that is born king of the Jews?"

Well, does it matter at all that you don't know their names? Does it matter at all that you don't know when they began their journey and from what point and how long it took them? Does it matter at all that you can't be sure that they were even kings? and three in number? Of course it doesn't matter very much at all. The important thing is what the Scriptures indicate -- they did come from where they were, and they came seeking. They were men who followed a star. Let's begin at that point.

Surely the star must have been seen by many people. Why were they the ones who followed it? Why were they the ones who responded? Well, let's dub them immediately -- they were men of decision. Having seen what they saw, they responded decisively. They made up their mind they'd do something about it. They did not stay where they were. They're remembered, you know, because they made the decision to follow. All those who may have seen the star and made no decision to follow it are forgotten! History has a way of remembering only those who respond decisively, and magnificently so when they respond decisively to something wonderful.

Now if you were to ask me why they were the ones to respond, I'm not so sure that I can tell you, any more than I can tell you now why there are certain people who are sensitive and other people who are insensitive. I only know that God is always giving us the chance to respond. Wordsworth, I dare say, is only partly right when he says, "God has a few whom He whispers in the ear - - "...I think I know what the poet had in mind, but I can't quite agree that there are only a few. I think God is always whispering to any number of us.....but only a few respond.

And that leads me to the second thing that I think I can tell you about these wise men - - that having responded decisively and made up their

mind to follow what they saw, they were men who were responding to something over and above and beyond them -- something absolutely magnificent, something had loomed upon the horizon for them that they had not seen before, and they could no longer be content in staying where they were. And they linked this thing with the undeniable fact of God.

Now with all the strength that I can command, I want to say to you that I honestly believe, and I'm numbered with those who honestly believe this, that God is always putting some sign in front of us -- God is always beckoning us onward, to something over, above and beyond ourselves. God is always asking us to get up from where we are and to respond to something brighter and better. Do you believe that? I most certainly do.

Now how God may put that sign in front of you, I don't know. He may tailor it according to your particular need. He may approach you according to the gifts and skills that you already have. He may come to you according to the situation in which you presently find yourself, and tailor His approach according to the forces and factors that are around you.

Generally speaking, I can tell you this --

...that as you read the Good Book, as you read the pages of Holy Writ, God is always putting up in front of you there, in one way or another, some sign, asking you to respond to it....

...I also know that every time we receive the Sacrament, God is coming to us in a special way, asking us to respond, to receive what He so freely gives....

....I also honestly believe that every time we come together as a company of believers, drawn by the Holy Spirit within the fellowship of the Christian Church,

God is raising up some sign . . .

It's a thrilling thing for me to look back over this chapter in time since 1956 -- the chapter for which I can speak, to see how again and again God has raised up in front of us, the people of this parish, some star to follow, some new world to enter. God is always doing this. And this is one reason why some of us have a way of saying that each Christmas gets brighter and better than the preceding one. This, too, I honestly believe. Now these wise men were men who responded to what God put in front of them.

And the third thing I can tell you about them is this: that they followed with determination. They made up their mind that they would stay until journey's end. That's a wonderful thing to be said about them. I wish he were here this morning in the congregation -- I think he ought to hear what I'm about to say. I thank God that our paths crossed some years back --

-- he's a very congenial and jovial soul, you'd like him very much. A very able boy. But now he's floundering. He came one day, within the past two weeks, just stopped in to touch base. We sat in the study. And then he told me, chapter and verse in his life -- "I've given up asking questions, Pastor, because I don't think there are any answers." I heard sadness in those words, whether he meant it to be sad or not, I heard sadness in those words . . . because then I remembered what he had told me earlier. At an impressionable age he came forward and made his statement of faith, he said he believed. And then he said he dropped it....he got away from it...he no longer stayed on the road.

Some of you have heard me say, when I have spoken to you, "Well, don't lose hope -- all the investment that you've made in those who are flesh-of-your-flesh and blood-of-your-blood -- it will come back. They can't be lost

to the church forever. You've given them too much to think that God would allow it to be wasted!" - - this I honestly believe.

But in the same breath I must also tell you that there is something lost when you can't stay on the road consistently, when the detour is too long, and maybe too devious. But to the everlasting credit of these wise men, we have reason to believe that they persevered with patience, they kept to the road. They never lost sight of the star!

It's one of the things that we talked about Friday night at Bethany, when five couples were there, and we talked about the obstacle course which is married life and the threats that come at one time or another to cause the marriage to deteriorate, and estrangement to set in. And every single couple spoke, in one way or another, paying tribute to the fact that it's worth sticking with, that one ought not to get off of the road. This is the lesson of the wise men - - they persevered.

Oh, I'm not forgetting - - the Good Book says that when they got to Jerusalem - - - got to Jerusalem!--- was that on the itinerary? Oh, that's simply to say they didn't have a direct route to Bethlehem, that's all that it says. And even though they got to Bethlehem by way of Jerusalem, they still did not give up! And even though in Jerusalem there was none to tell them where Christ was to be born, at least to their satisfaction -- wasn't there that moment, you see, when they weren't sure -- daren't we believe this? . . . nonetheless, they didn't give up.

One of the gratifying things that I've discovered in life is to be able to sit down with people who have traveled the road for a considerable farther distance than I and have lived longer than I have, and to have them tell me, "It's worth it! Stay on the road! Don't give up!" For a wise man also once said that down deep inside every man there remains the tempta-

tion to go too far on the wrong road.

Now, what was it they were seeking? I'd like to suggest to you that they were seeking wisdom, and that's why they were called wise men. That's another reason why they were called wise men -- not because they were as smart as they were, or learned . . .

....oh, by the way, did it ever occur to you that the average youngster in kindergarten today may know more about nature and things mechanical and things scientific, even at an early age, than they did, the wise men in their maturity?....
...yet we call them the wise people. They were wise because they were following something which they believed was linked up with God. And when they arrived as they did, they began from that moment to see things as they had never seen before, from the God perspective -- and that's what true wisdom is! He only is wise who sees things from the point of view that God maintains.

There was a writer once who envisioned an invasion of Earth by people from Mars. And when a Martian had been here for a while he returned to his own planet, and he did, of course, what you would expect him to do, give a formal report. And he simply concluded -- "Those Earth-dwellers -- they're mad people! They think they're wise, but they're mad. They build great cities....and then every two or three decades they bomb and destroy them, crumble them into dust! They have great laboratories, endless research as to how to combat infant mortality....and then they have all those pollutants that endanger life. They have magnificent highways....on which they slaughter people by the thousands each year -- -- "

....that's how we might look, we who claim to be so wise, to the man from Mars.

Last summer some of us stood at the Eagle's Nest in Berchtesgaden -- we thought of that man Adolph Hitler, who thought in his wisdom how he'd bring into reality the Third Reich -- the Caesar of our day. Where did the wisdom of Adolph Hitler take him? I want to read it for you -- only a paragraph or two from Erich Fromm, that wise and good man, interviewed by a staff writer of the New York Times that appeared in yesterday's edition. He's not at all optimistic -- in fact the article has this headline:

ERICH FROMM ON THE NATION (meaning the United States)

"I AM NOT AN OPTIMIST"

Said he, "Our society is also internally destructive. In the last decade or so a million people have been killed in the highway accidents. We produce cars with built-in obsolescence; knowing the possible dangers, we continue to pollute the environment; and we subsidize violence on the screen, movies in which human life is depicted as brutish and as cheap." But he does have this to say -- "There is a moral residue in America composed of our religious and humane tradition in which the proper goal of society is to serve its members."

...he summed it up by saying, "America lives in a state of idolatry. But what is urgent now, if we are not to continue on the path of destructiveness and national suicide, is a renewal of a sense of general religious values."

And that, by the way, is exactly the lesson of the wise men. Their journey through life was in search of religious values, and for us Christians they found them personified in Him who was born to be King, who is our Lord and Saviour.

Now, where would you look for Jesus Christ? Take a page from the wise men's journal. They found Him at the end of their search, in the helpless-

ness of a tiny baby's cry....in the enfolding arms of a new mother....
....and in the pure devotion of a man for his maid.

Honestly now, wise men conclude the matter as simply as that, and
sophistication, which some of us believe is the curse of our
generation, was quickly abandoned.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)